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Dare .

By

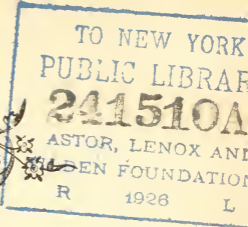
Mary W. Glascock, . . .

San Francisco,

The California Publishing Company,

1882.

M. S. 1882



DARE.

CHAPTER I.

OF SUCH IS THE FAMILY OF BRENT.

HERE we are, paraded like a host of Fatimas towards Blue Beard's closet to meet our luckless fate, with Mater marshaling us with looks more terrible than a cimeter. I suppose I e'en must 'screw my courage to the sticking point.' You girls are like goslings. Where Deb leads, you follow. I must be the traditional 'Ugly Duckling'; for I do like out-of-way ponds, although I appreciate Mater's ruffled-hen feeling sometimes. 'De Lord made me as I am,' Aunt Judy would say."

Dare Brent stopped at the head of the winding stairway that led to the garret, and delivered her "growl," as she dubbed it.

"Hurry," Mrs. Brent exclaimed, "I cannot wait. We have only a week, and four girls to prepare for—"

"The sacrifice," Dare interrupted. "Do leave me out, and reduce your trials to three."

"How ridiculous in you," Deb replied. "You must go. There shall be no lessening of our phalanx, except by marriage. Here we are, Brents from eighteen to twenty-three. We ought to be labeled."

"Like mixtures of quinine, I suppose. 'When taken to be well shaken.' When we follow Mater in stately grandeur, with Jack bringing up the rear, I always feel as if we were an advertisement to a show. Come up, gentlemen, and take your choice: Deb only is marked reserved."

They entered the garret, where even the "picturesqueness of dirt" was foregone, Dare used to say, with a sigh. Every corner in Mrs. Brent's house was immaculate; every object, except Dare's fingers, which were generally adorned with chrome-yellow, crimson-lake, or Prussian blue, and sometimes all combined, producing, at times, quite Turner-esque effects.

Blue Beard's closet was a receptacle for ball dresses, sheathed in sheets, and suspended from nails, looking like ghosts of the finery beneath; or,

in the twilight, resembling decapitated corpses, which suggested the idea of the name to Dare, and caused her heart to quake with many a thrill of dread whenever she was called upon to enter their sacred precinct to attire herself for a sacrifice to the ogre, society. Sister Anne was appealed to in vain. The ogre himself was not more terrible nor firm than Margaret Brent when she made up her mind that an object should be accomplished. Attired in clinging robes of widow's black, a refined mourning gown of velvet or soft satin, which brought out clearly the perfect outlines of face and figure, she was the admiration of society. They compared her to a Disraeli or Gladstone in point of tact, thereby rendering her according adulation. Mrs. Brent was a wonderfully preserved woman, and had fortunately attained the summit of "fair and forty" without the accompanying adipose tissue.

She was proud, very proud. It was a trait inherited through a long line of be-wigged gentlemen and short-waisted ladies, whose portraits hung on the library walls, with their charms rapidly fading from the canvas.

The founder of the American family was supposed to have accompanied Sir Walter Raleigh in his visit to the Old Dominion, and settled there. From him they traced back various ramifications,

until their origin was lost in the mists of Norman obscurity.

In her youth, Mrs. Brent had reigned a belle in the capital, and had imbibed the air of a fashionable world with her first breath. No wonder its approbation to her was the *ultimum bonum* of existence, and its sweetest creed. Better fifty years of pomp and vanity than a cycle of obscurity. She was stern to the extreme in the management of her family Pentateuch. Her countenance was the mental barometer of the household: when it expressed approval, the spirits accordingly rose, weather was sunny, smiles abounded; if the reverse in the morning, Jack sneaked off down town hastily, and mercury fell many degrees below zero. Deb and her satellites haunted corners; only Dare persisted in whistling through the halls, despite the uncertainty of results.

The family income was small, and it required any amount of elasticity to coax the two ends to meet at the close of a year; and Mrs. Brent's supreme effort was to conceal that fact, and maintain her position in the temple of fashion as chief priestess.

Deborah, the oldest daughter, was plump, pretty, and good-natured, looked up to as an oracle of propriety by her sisters. and also invested with the

dignity of an engagement to a rising young professor of a family of *irreproachable* wealth.

Claire and Lel were mild reflections, both equally pretty in separate degrees of bloneness.

Dare was the odd one. Her hair was jetty black, and grew low on her forehead. She entirely spoiled the rank of Venus-like profile, in regard to her nose, for it certainly scorned all the Grecian rules of propriety, by possessing a skyward tendency very laudable in souls, but very heterodox in noses. Socrates's nasal organ was a slight comfort to her; but then, that might account for Xantippe's onslaughts. So she resigned herself to the inevitable, and painted rows of ideal noses. Her complexion was clear olive; her eyes dark gray, containing a frank, restless expression. They were keen and penetrating. "Mis' Dare's jest looks right through you. 'Tain't no use tryin' to fool her. She's like pore Massa Brent," Aunt Judy remarked, admiringly.

Dare's mouth was large — another grievance, which was (thankfully) shared by Jack, affording her a mild form of comfort.

Dare was an anomaly of the age; she was independent. She hated society with a holy hatred; conventionalities tired her. The restlessness in her eyes was reflected in her manners, and she was prone to be abrupt.

With all her faults, which were many, she loved her family with a deep, absorbing affection, particularly Jack, for he was her idol; and he, like all mankind, received her adoration as a matter of course.

Jack and Dare were twins—a new edition of Castor and Pollux—and from infancy had been boon companions. Jack's university education was almost completed. Dare was absorbed in finding an occupation for him, while he calmly lay back in an easy-chair smoking cigarettes, his mind engrossed with the latest style of canes that fellow from London had brought over the pond, and new race horses.

Aunt Judy is the last, but by no means the least important, member of the family; for she had nursed Dare's father when he was a baby, and filled the place of general adviser to the whole family. "Law, Mis' Margaret," she was wont to say, "suah dis family would fall to ruin widout me." And she would shake her bandana handkerchief with pride.

"Well, girls," Dare said, seating herself on a trunk, "this fuss and feathers is awful. Dress reviews are ruinous to my nerves. Of course I spilt ice-cream on my red silk, and the tarletans are mussy. This subject of wearing is terrific—ruf-

fles, plaits, folds, etc. Bah! I am sick of them. Plainness would be a variety. I suppose the love of clothes was born in us, and must come out, like infantile rashes, only they are ill's flesh is heir to. They stop; you have a chance to recover: the ruffling never does. It is a disease that lasts. Each change of season fans the fever, and it is doubly renewed in feminine veins until it comes to the shroud; then the question of bias or plain is immaterial. I'll wager Mother Eve picked out all the nicest scalloped fig-leaves, and varied them with other shrubs to attain tender spring greens, deeper summer ones, russet crimsons of autumn, or brown of winter. Dreary me! even Jack the immaculate is getting to care for the shade of his gloves. 'How are the mighty fallen!' Once he didn't mind going without." She gave a sigh of resignation, and commenced whistling.

"Do be quiet," Deb implored.

"How can you?" the two other Misses Brents mildly demanded.

"Do you think pink silk will do?" Deb turned to her mother appealingly. "I can wear my lace fishu and blush roses to cover the old stitching, so nobody will remember it. I have not worn it for ages."

"Never fret your noble soul about that. O,

mighty Deborah!" Dare rejoined, "I can answer you: a woman would recognize an article, even if it constituted a part of your great-grandmother's finery. You know we fixed Lel so delightfully in my old white silk, done over with illusion. Nowwithstanding it was a delusion on our part to think of escaping, the keen glance of detection belonging to Mrs. Pomfret. I heard her remark, *sotto voce*: 'Rather pretty girl, youngest Miss Brent. Nice, quiet style; but her costume looks rather familiar. These large families have to make over, I suppose.' So, sister mine, content yourself; every breadth of that pink silk has been faithfully explored by Mrs. Pomfret *et als*. Possess your soul with patience, and rise above the emergency."

"Stop your clatter, Dare: I can hardly think," Mrs. Brent commanded. And with the air of a Napoleon marshaling his troops, she turned her attention thoughtfully toward the dresses.

"Deb can wear the pink; Claire will be a contrast in blue; Dare, you are destitute; and Lel can embroider her white cashmere, if she will rise at five in the mornings."

"O, this crew-el work!" Dare held up her hands in comical dismay. "Forgive the pun, Mater. I really couldn't pass the opportunity over. I think it will be a precious waste of eye-

sight. Let me stay at home. I am saving up for an etching down at Morris's. Lovely sunset effect. The foliage touch is divine."

"What do you think about knife plaitings?" Deb interrupted. "Lel, get your hat, and run down to the decorative art rooms for the crewels. Mind the rose shades. Claire, I want you to help; and Dare, you are good for nothing."

"I'll go interview Jack, then," she answered, rising. "Mater, I don't want clothes. We've starved our minds and eyes long enough. The etching is gorgeous. I have counted up gloves, hack, etc., and if we stay at home we can do it." She looked triumphant. "Besides," she added, "I am so tired of the girls' boarding-school daubs—purple lakes and permanent blue mountains, with herbage of chrome-green, and a few starved cattle of impossible proportions in the foreground."

"My daughter, you forget: our position in society is certainly of far more importance than some black and white scrawl," Mrs. Brent answered, with her freezing air.

Dare, undaunted, sighed. "Society is like an Aztec war-god: it not only demands the sacrificial garments, but tears our very hearts out. I detest dancing, you get so awfully hot, and ice chills you; champagne means headache and repentance in the

morning. Your laws savor of the Medes and Persians, Mater; so I have to succumb. Seriously, too, I am worried about Jack. He is very much changed lately. I don't approve of his new friend Dartmore."

"Nonsense, Jack is gaining a little more polish through his influence: that is all." Mrs. Brent summarily snubbed the argument, and with her daughters following, went down to the sitting-room, and commenced sewing, while Dare idly took up a pencil and scribbled on a piece of paper.

"The Misses Brent in the throes," she cried, waving it aloft. "Various expressions of despair, warranted genuine."

"What's up?" Jack asked, as he entered the room.

Dare shrugged her shoulders. "Nothing, only I have been wondering how human nature can stand the constant pushing to and fro of a needle, and have been taking notes. It's proper to sew, but I hate it. I would prefer Caddy Jellyby's condition to this 'demd horrid grind.' Don't be shocked, Deb. It is Mr. Dickens; quite correct, I assure you. For future reference, hunt up Mr. Matalini."

"You ought to fix up a little more." Jack eyed her critically. "The fellows like to see a girl look

nice, and you are a bit dowdy sometimes. The young baronet down town was admiring Deb and the others amazingly. 'They look like English roses, so trim,' he said. He will be at the party. A man likes to have his sisters admired.

"I suppose your offshoot of the British aristocracy would compare me to a Castilian rose, fit for kitchen-gardens. I might get off the old sentiment about uncultured fragrance, etc., but will mercifully spare you the infliction."

"Sir John will be at Mrs. Dalton's," Jack informed her, in an aside. "Look your best, Dare; you're the smartest of the lot, at any rate."

"Who is Sir John? One of the tame British lions? I hope he is mild. I am not used to bearding the lion out of his den. Social celebrities are my aversion. I suppose he is over-young, with words of warning from his patrician mamma sounding in his ears, 'to beware of designing American damsels.' I suppose he carries the warning in his manners, and treads warily, as if all girls were so many deep-lain snares to catch the wandering monarch of beasts. A whole menagerie couldn't tempt me to go, but Mater says I must."

"It's all up with you, then. Sir John is a muff at billiards. It makes me mad to see the fellows give him so much advantage. If a fellow can't

play billiards, he's a regular muff, I say; but good by, sis, I'm off: promised a fellow to come back and go to the theater to-night."

"O, Jack! how could you?" She looked at him reproachfully. "You know it is the last night of the art exhibition, and I wanted so much to take a farewell look at the dear old 'Don Quixote.'"

"Sorry, sis; can't help it. Must go." Vigorously slamming the door, he left the room. Deb started.

"Dare, I wish you and Jack could be quiet. You completely upset my nerves with your whistling. Do be lady-like."

"Thank heavens, my nerves are an unconscious possession at present. Nerves are awfully American. I'm patriotic, but I do envy our English cousins on that point."

"Why don't you do something?" Claire mildly questioned.

"Because my crayon is all out and my head empty. The artistic idea *nacitur non fit*."

Dare left the room impatiently, and after roaming about the house for a while, went down to the kitchen as a temporary refuge.

"Aunt Judy," she demanded, "haven't you a mess you can let me take hold of? I'm desperate. Remember Satan's proclivities for idle hands."

“Law, Mis’ Dare, Mis’ Margaret done tole me not to let you do anything in de kitchen. She’s ’feared you’ll burn your hands ’fore de party.” The old woman peered carefully into the dark pantry, as if hunting for his Satanic Majesty behind flour bags and sugar barrels.

“Foiled again,” Dare exclaimed, tragically, with melodramatic gestures. “I shouldn’t have thought it of you, Aunt Judy, nipping my artistic cookery in the bud. I had ecstatic visions of tarts filled with ruby jelly of currant, blended into purple of blackberry, framed in pastry of *écru tinge*. *Et tu, Brute!*”

“Law, chile, has you got a fit?” The old woman rushed for the mustard. “You roll yer eyes jest like Mis’ Smith when she was took so bad. I ain’t nipped nothin’; its that nasty Ah Hoy. He nips sugar, and I tole your ma so. Old yellow monkey!” And she wrinkled up her face expressively.

“Peace reign between you and Ah Hoy, Aunt Judy. Respect the memory of his country, that bore a Confucius.”

“What do I know about any ’Fucius?” she answered, with a disdainful sniff; “’ceptin’ them red things Mis’ Deb wears in her hair? Dey ain’t much pumpkins, anyway. I’ve seen heap better in ole Virginy. Go ’long wid you.”

Dare ran up-stairs to her own room, as a harbor of refuge. Its furnishing was characteristic of her tastes. The floor was bare and stained a walnut color, with two scarlet rugs to relieve its darkness; the furniture was odd, of incongruous styles; the windows guiltless of draperies. "The idea of shutting out sunshine and a beautiful view with woolen stuffs," she said, indignantly, to Deb's protests, whose own room was completely shrouded in dainty blue cretonne.

Papers, magazines, and books, from "Cosmos" down to "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas," were scattered in confusion on the large wooden table. An engraving of Raphael's Madonna occupied the honored place on the wall; while underneath it a bracket contained a vase of flowers, when her one rose-bush bloomed. Dare possessed a savory bit of the salt of sentiment in her heart, but endeavored hard to conceal it. Vigorous drawings of hands, feet, and heads; studies from casts, were tacked on the wall, until Jack remarked that it reminded him more of a powder explosion than anything else. An easel was placed beside the window, containing a half-finished portrait of Jack, with the addition of a brigandish mustache attached to his upper lip. "It's going to be a Ugolino," Dare explained. But it was always go-

ing to be: for the eyes never could be brought up to the requisite pitch of fierceness, and Jack was not a patient model; so the picture was a matter of future speculation to the family.

Then she stopped work; for after examining it critically, Master Jack slyly suggested putting a glass of lager in the hands, and turning it into a sign board for a saloon. Thereupon the worthy painter was much offended.

Dinner was announced, and the family met in the dining-room. Deb was limp with weariness from much stitching. Lel's eyes were red from embroidering, while Claire echoed the double misfortune from assisting. Only lazy Dare was bright and saucy as usual.

"Where is Jack?" Mrs. Brent asked.

Dare answered: "Gone with some fellows to the theater. Ah! the glory of being a man. Jack and I ought to have been a pair of boys, instead of being assorted."

Mr. Barton, Deb's cavalier, came in to spend the evening.

"Good night," Dare said; "I can stand family love, but lovers: no. Hurry up and incorporate him. He's jolly for chemical experiments. I expect he labels you oxygen, Deb. It's his favorite gas."

“I will personate hydrogen, and blow you up, if you do not disappear quickly,” Deb retorted.

After Mr. Barton's departure, Dare made a farewell tour of the girls' rooms. “I see you all are encompassed in the toils of embryo montagues. No one would imagine those fluffy tendrils that surround the Misses Brent's ‘charming faces’ (a quotation from the immortal Dartmore) were due to curl papers or a liberal application of sticky bandoline. *Vanitas vanitatum*— I'll finish to-morrow,” she laughed, as she left the room.





CHAPTER II.

“O TEMPORA, O MORES.”



TRIALS and tribulations manifold are ills no flesh is exempt from. They were crowding thick as locusts in summer time upon the Brent family. In great crises of life, we can bear with equanimity the small worries and jars; but in the ordinary course of existence, we fret our souls over trifles.

When an epidemic sweeps over a place, we excuse Bidley's eccentricities; but if one of the babies merely suffer from whooping-cough, or some other wholesome infantile complaint, we can't "rise to the occasion," if the domestic wheels are refractory.

The night of the Dalton party arrived, after spirit and flesh had been duly mortified by hard toil. The family were completely worn out with much stitching and planning, for pleasure; and, added to this, it was a typical Californian winter night. The preceding evening the moon had shone forth in

wanted brilliancy. To-night fair Luna was obstinate, mourning, perhaps, for the follies of a younger world; she had drawn a sable veil over her face, and, like Rachel, refused to be comforted. The wind set steadily from a southerly direction all day. Lel declared that she had formed two wrinkles on her nose going out at intervals of half-hours and gazing upward at their neighbor's weathercock; but the gilded chanticleer refused to move, and remained as immutable as fate. After dark a dense mist gathered over the bay, and by nine the rain descended in torrents. It was not a gentle patter, suggestive of dreamy nights or soft lullabys, but a hard, incessant, vicious pour; and the wind howled a wild accompaniment, varying from high falsetto round the corners to deep bass down the street. Their house was perched on top of one of the many hills in which San Francisco abounds, where the storm had a fair chance to vent its fury.

It scorned the lordly piles of the millionaires, for barred doors and shuttered windows repelled the attack; but it only redoubled its wrath upon the less favored mansions, and shrieked round them as if "the spirits of the damned were loose."

The girls were assembled in Deb's room, because she was the sole possessor of a full-length mirror, and the whole family were engrossed in a

crimping process. Deb was the victim. Claire heated the tongs, while Lel held the brown paper to keep the hair from burning.

"Be careful," Deb implored. "My locks are scant, and blonde hair is at a premium in the market."

An awful shriek sounded from the fireplace, and Claire dropped the tongs, and held up a blistered finger, saying angrily: "You will have to call Aunt Judy. I am not half fixed yet."

"She is lacing mother's dress. Pity Ah Hoy isn't available," Deb replied, sarcastically. "There now, we are all getting cross. Dare, you better stop mooning, and commence dressing."

Dare was standing by the window, looking out. "It is a perfect Walpurgis night. There a lighter cloud passed, and looked like a witch with streaming hair. The lights down town flicker like rush lights in the darkness," she said. "Jack isn't home, so there is no hurry. We can't go without him."

"But Richard is waiting for me," said Deb.

"Poor Richard!" returned Dare. "It will take him some time before he is 'himself again,' if he has been consigned to the gloom of our best parlor for the past hour. I hope he brought a small volume of chemistry along in his pocket, as a sort of antidote to the family album."

"Girls, you must dress," Mrs. Brent said, entering the room, looking perfectly cool and possessed in her long velvet gown. She regarded their mountainous troubles as mere molehills, to be brushed away. Margaret Brent could have weathered a Scylla or Charybdis, and the world never would have seen a trace of the struggle in her calm expression.

"I must restore order in this limbo," she said, sorting the various laces and flowers that were scattered in confusion on the bed, chairs, and floor. "Dare, you must dress immediately."

"Do let me beg off, Mater."

"No," Mrs. Brent answered, sternly.

"I do believe the canvas of the ball-room is as dear to your heart as 'the dust of Zion was to the captives in Babylon'; but you look so queenly I'll forgive you this one affliction, and obey," Dare retorted, as she left the room.

As a last grievance, Deb's dress was too tight; but Aunt Judy, with assistance, forced it to meet.

"'Pears to me like you'll bust, chile," she said.

"It *is* uncomfortable; but we must look well or die. No one suspects the soldier-like qualities of endurance hidden beneath the satins and smiles of a young woman in society."

“Well,” Dare exclaimed, as she entered the room, “is this worth all the agony? Deb, your waist is decidedly below Venus-like proportions; but you girls do look like ‘a rosebud garden.’ I’m the hollyhock.”

“You look ever so nice,” they protested.

“Only don’t stand around,” Deb requested.

“I will try,” she responded meekly; “but it behooves me ill to sit in chairs when tempting corners are nigh.”

Jack put in an appearance at last, and they descended, fully equipped, to the parlor.

“Never mind the Britisher,” he whispered to Dare; “I’ve my suspicions. He pockets coin mighty lively for a scion of a noble race.”

“Deborah, you look flushed,” Mr. Barton said, greeting her.

“Yes,” Dare interrupted, “I wish your genius could devise some means of giving elasticity to silk.”

“I see it is needed; but the only remedy is a little more silk, you saucy miss.”

“This is a sort of Purgatorio in preparation for an Inferno,” Dare said, as they entered the carriage, and a fresh gust of wind threatened to destroy their equilibrium.

They reached their destination in safety, despite

wind and weather being adverse. Strains of music floated on the air. "How delicious!" the girls exclaimed. "Why don't you growl, Dare?"

"Music hath charms to soothethe savage breast," she replied, laconically. They ascended the broad floral-lined stairway to the dressing-room, where they were met by a bevy of friends adorned in splendor the looms of the Indies could hardly rival. San Francisco is noted for the costumes of her fair damsels; for even the daughters of Paris, in all their glory, are not arrayed like unto these.

They stood in awe of Dare's brusque speeches; but the other girls were especial favorites, when they were not rivals. "How lovely!" "Perfectly beautiful!" "Gorgeous mustache! Whiskers too sweet for anything!"—were expressions which mingled with the distant strains of a Strauss waltz. Miss Lily Barnett, one of the belles of society, by reason of a superior number of wholesome ducats, came up to Deb with a most affected air. "O, we have brought him," she said mysteriously. Then stopped to look around and see if her words had produced an electric shock on the audience. "Sir John." Another triumphant pause. "He is too nice for anything. Is he not, mamma?" appealing to an older edition of her affectations standing near, who dutifully responded, "Yes, my dear."

"I ache to shake that little doll, and see if she and mamma are not made of sawdust. I am sure their heads contain no other substance," Dare said, in a vicious aside.

"Do try to be agreeable. They are awfully rich; and it is bad, for the girls' sake, not to be pleasant," prudent Deb whispered.

"A Baron Rothschild, or even a Cræsus, could not awe me."

"Hush, Dare. Mother is waiting."

"Stick close, Jack, my courage is oozing. I am afraid of the animals in these wilds," Dare implored, as they entered the room. The girls were immediately surrounded with hosts of admirers.

"Black spirits and white,
Red spirits and gray,"

Dare muttered, inaudibly. One venturesome youth asked her to dance, but shrunk back, bowing in dismay, as she bestowed a scornful glance on his five feet of stature, and answered, "I never dance."

"They look like tops, for all the world." Dare turned to Mr. Barton, who was standing near watching the dancers. "This incessant whirl makes me giddy. I keep speculating, as the boys do, which top will keep up longest."

"Allow me to introduce somebody, Miss Dare."

"Well, I don't exactly relish the position of

mural decoration. I am not of the Burne Jones type, and don't show off well against a maroon background; but much less can I stand the usual ball-room twaddle. These rooms are artistic, usually. Now, they have no individuality, with the Persian carpets sheathed in white canvas, the furniture vanished, and replaced by a mass of kaleidoscopic colors. The young gentlemen's wits seem to disappear also with the other belongings. There is a general air of vacuity in their upper regions, as if a tenant had moved out, and they favored us in the interim, before the new idea has taken possession."

"I see my friend Jones over there. I am going to introduce him. You will find some species of ideas, I warrant you. You said you liked very young or very old men. He has just left the callow age. He is a graduate of Yale, and devoted to Shakspere. I warn you."

Mr. Barton steered his way across the room, and returned with a youth who evidently had just attained the age of voting, supposed also to be that of discretion. His complexion was of a mouse-colored hue, his eyes ditto, his hair of Titian redness. Alack! His hair, like poor Twaddles's, "stood on end."

"Angel and ministers of Grace!" thought Dare, "is this the Shaksperian youth?"

After the formal introduction, Mr. Barton excused himself.

"Miss Brent," Mr. Jones said, "I am glad to find a sympathetic soul that does not join in the 'light fantastic.' You see, there is 'no fisher but the ungrown fry forbear.' So I am left to swim in safety, at will.

"That smacks of the classic William of Avon," Dare thought. "I feel complimented. You leave me out of the race of fishers. I protest."

"You are the Lorelei that charms all, even the smallest minnow," he answered, with a low bow.

"Our acquaintance will come to a brief termination, if you commence with compliments, Mr. Jones. My soul rises above them. Women possess a little discrimination in regard to sweets. I confess, we like the genuine, but are not so blind as not to recognize the plaster heart beneath your sugar-coated flatteries, which are like the carnival confections in Rome."

"If I ask you why you are so hard on human nature, or why you look so sad, I suppose, like Salarino, you will answer me, 'you are sad because you are not merry.' I am afraid of you, Miss Brent. You are pungent as muriatic acid."

"All the chemical properties of our family belong to Mr. Barton," she said, looking at him mischievously.

“What amusing people one sees in a ball-room. The seven ages, barring the first two, are all represented. There goes the hero of the engagement, Sir John Steppes. ‘He brags of his substance not of ornament.’ Snobbish, in the extreme—a libel on our British cousins. But look at the old lady in *décolleté* pink silk.”

Dare laughed. “She will die at her post. For several series of winters she has done her duty well in Paris, Washington, San Francisco. She cannot even forbear the rosy hue, which, combined with liberal applications of *creme de lis*, produces a ghastly effect. I think it is pitiful, this holding on to youth like a miser to his gold. The graces of age are myths of past centuries, and buried with chivalry. She is dancing with youths she probably dandled on her knees. We have misses here in all the degrees of the Sprat family—lean, fat, and middling.”

“More like Bacon,” Mr. Jones remarked.

“I was given to understand you were purely Shaksperian. Another comparison is rank heresy.”

“How could you, Miss Brent? I am a convert to the Baconian theory: Holmes effected it.”

Jack came up hurriedly. “Let me take you and introduce you to the baronet.”

“No, thanks. Mahomet may come to the moun-

tain, but the mountain refuses to go to Mahomet." Jack went away disappointed.

"I do wish supper-time would come," Dare sighed. "I suppose you are shocked, Mr. Jones; but when I do penance by helping fill up a room, I expect my compensation in the form of oysters."

"Possess your soul with patience, I have a kindred feeling. 'By the prickling i' my thumb,' I think the hour is nigh. Let us promenade, and look at yards of Madonnas painted by Italian art students—atrociously, too."

"Unlike Ruskin, Californians don't take to 'modern painters.'"

After a few steps, that dire sound, the loosening of gathers and plaits, sounded in Dare's ears. She turned around: a gentleman had stepped on her train. "O, dear! I looked at him as if I could cheerfully box his ears. I don't believe in smiling when you feel like the other thing," she said to Mr. Jones. The unfortunate bungler blushed, apologized, and withdrew into a corner.

"I declare," Jones laughed, "you have some color. The poor doctor 'looks so lean that blasts of January could blow him through and through.'"

"Who is my tormentor?"

"Dr. Lloyd, a man deep learned in science. He has been in the wilds of Mexico for the last five

years, studying Aztec manuscripts, their picture lore; so I suppose he has forgotten civilized customs, and imagines he is at a sacrificial rite. He is near-sighted, and a very enthusiastic admirer of art."

"A man after my own heart, then, in spite of his offense," Dare replied. "I should like to meet him after supper. I must fortify myself well for his ponderous learning. O for a page of a vanished Prescott!"

"Dare," Deb interrupted, coming up to her with an expression of deep despair in her blue eyes, "please come to the dressing-room with me?"

"With pleasure," she responded, rising with alacrity. "My gathers need looking after."

When they reached the room Dare stood and looked at Deb's doleful countenance with a mite of satisfaction. "Have you, too, concluded the golden apple was Dead Sea fruit? Does the dress pinch or your feet ache, Lady Dolorous?"

"Worse, worse than that." Deb shook her head mournfully, and sat down in a chair, for she never forgot comfort even when in the depths of misery. "I have offended Richard. He told me not to dance with Sir John twice."

"And you did: natural perversity of woman," Dare interposed.

"I was well paid for it. He stepped on my foot,

and the horrid creature's boots were blacked, and rubbed off on my lower flounce. What shall I say to Richard? I only want to half-way give in gracefully."

"That is the difference between most men and women," Dare said scornfully. "Begging the sex's pardon. Men do things out-and-out. If they are mad, they are so in earnest; if wrong, they acknowledge it: while a woman always edges around things. Be honest, Deb. Richard will honor you all the more for it; lovers are ready to forgive. Changing the subject—for sweathearts' quarrels are not worth the wasted breath, they are as inevitable as the changes of seasons—are the girls not danced out yet? I am so tired. Excuse this yawn, but it is a safety-valve." As they went down-stairs, supper was announced. Verily, the animal propensities of man crop forth at the sight of toothsome food, for they followed the hostess as a flock of sheep does the leader when it discovers a fresh patch of green herbage. Deb seated herself by her mother. Mr. Jones claimed the pleasure of waiting on Dare.

After much scrambling and pushing, he appeared with a plate of luscious bivalves. "Those fellows in brass buttons are used to fighting at mess, I should judge: I had an awful time trying to overcome them; but finally 'Troy was conquered, and here is the result.'" He handed her the plate.

"Doctor, won't you join our party?" he called to a long, lank individual lounging in the corner, and looking very desolate.

"Certainly, my dear boy," he responded, with alacrity.

Introductions followed.

"Doctor, I will excuse the 'boy' this once. Remember I am full-fledged, right from under the wings of Mother Yale."

"I will apologize. Time goes so fast. I am growing old," he answered, half regretfully and meditatively.

"I don't like this idea of 'the flowing bowl' resembling Fortunatus's purse. Young Simpkins looks rather unsteady now. He should be imbibing the nursery diet of good old bread-and-milk. I wonder where Jack is?" Dare asked.

"I saw him last in the billiard-room," Mr. Jones answered. "He seems to avoid the young ladies."

"Yes: Jack has never entered the spoony age."

"I think it is extremely unfortunate," the Doctor remarked. "Once I had a young man under my care on a European trip, and I rested content as long as he was in love, either with Italian eyes, Grecian profiles, or Señorita's smiles. I thought he might escape greater evils."

"He may forego sins, but he is an awful afflic-

tion upon his friends, unless he takes to sonnet writing and studying Horatian meter," Dare answered. She looked towards the supper-room uneasily, as she heard shouts of loud laughter. "I think the gentlemen are having too much wine."

All at once a crash sounded, like breaking of glass. A dead silence followed.

"What is it?" the ladies exclaimed, who were sitting with Dare in a small room off the dining-room. Claire came in, with her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling with excitement, and her pink skirts gathered up in her hands.

"O, Dare, it was awful!" she said, shuddering. "One man must have been intoxicated, and threw a bottle of wine at another one's head. It broke, and I was near, so my dress is perfectly ruined"; holding it up ruefully. "I am a deluge of champagne."

"It would have been better for that man if he had more outside and less in. Jack? It was not Jack?"

Dare waited breathlessly for an answer.

"No. He was standing near, and told me to find you all and go home. It's two o'clock, anyhow, and I am a wreck."

"Never mind, dear."

Dare commenced to wipe at her dress with her lace handkerchief.

"Don't. You will spoil it," Clare protested.

"You see the 'flowing bowl' has run over." Dare smiled as she bade the gentlemen "good night."

"We hope you gentlemen will call soon. I am sorry, for Mrs. Dalton's sake, that this trouble has occurred."

The Doctor replied to the invitation to call, with a courtly bow; while Jones mentally decided, "It should be very soon."

They arrived at home a dejected family, except Mrs. Brent, for she was a person whom circumstances never affected.

"O, dear! My silk is ruined, and can't be done over," Claire said mournfully, gazing at the wreck.

"I have offended Richard," Deb sobbed.

"I stood it better than I expected," rejoined Dare.

"You had the long and short of it," Jack retorted.

"Yes. The tall Doctor is very interesting; and young Jones is bright and amusing, although I prefer smaller doses of Shakspeare, or a variation. He proceeds on Aunt Judy's plan of one remedy, and thinks Shakspeare, like castor oil, reaches every ill. Girls!" Dare turned to the forlorn-looking trio.

with an amused gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. "It don't pay—let's sleep on it. Perhaps to-morrow will straighten out the tangles. Jack," she called, after they had parted for the night, "come back for a moment." He responded with a yawn, rubbing his eyes sleepily as he reappeared. She looked at him earnestly. "It would have broken my heart if you had been mixed up in that scrape; and Ugolino would have been unfinished," she added regretfully.

"Your fears seem to be more for Ugolino than me," he said teasingly. "Don't worry, sis. I will come out all right. You found two devoted cavaliers at the ball. I am afraid there is no choice in regard to beauty. Do try to civilize the Doctor, and snub Jones. We fellows are sick of Mexico and Yale. You have stumbled across a good chance for missionary endeavors. Like Alexander, you have sighed for worlds to conquer. Fate has placed two men in your pathway."

"I hope I can in time reply with the trite Cæsar-ian motto, '*Veni, vidi—*'"

"Spare us the rest." Jack held up his hand in simulated horror. "It recalls too vividly to my mind peach-tree twigs and '*Gallia est omnis.*' The first line was always a stumbler to my infantile mind."

The wind which had raged all night subsided

into a gentle moan, but Dare could not sleep when she reached her room. When she closed her eyes, visions of tall and short individuals, arrayed in savage attire, ranged themselves around the room; while she seemed to be the instructress, and issued rewards of merit in the shape of choice etchings.

Towards daylight she dropped into a sound sleep, and not even the thunder of a hundred passing milk-wagons engaged in their matutinal dispensation of the watery fluid could awaken her. She slept the sleep of the righteous.





CHAPTER III.

MATTERS MANIFOLD.

CALIFORNIA weather is very much like feminine nature. It wastes its fury in storms of two or three days, then quietly subsides into the calm of summer-time. Afterwards it breaks into a fog or mild drizzle. A slight veer of wind produces more showers. Thus it alternates.

So with the average female temper. Her wrath is dire in its first onslaught, but soon dimples into good nature, with all traces of the disturbance lost; then suddenly changes again at an adverse circumstance or word. Soon a calming breeze tempers all, and the sky and mind are clear and cloudless.

Both the weather and woman's freaks are among the unaccountables in the phenomena of nature.

The rain was over as soon as the Brent family had recovered from their fatigue. "They had been undergoing mental and physical repairs." Dare in-

formed Mr. Jones, when she met him in the street a few days after. "The rumples in our dresses and tempers needed smoothing, so we have stayed indoors and ironed both out," she added frankly.

The sun was shining warm and bright. The heavens reflected a deep blue in the waters of the bay, which were covered with white sails, looking like downy breasts of sea-birds reclining on its bosom. The fresh breeze that blew over the Pacific, through the Golden Gate, contained the elixir of life. It equaled a draught of the distilled sunbeams in Donatello's cellars. The ocean winds are brisk and life-giving. They stimulate energy and ambition, and are a relentless foe to idleness, except when they sigh through dreamy Southern orange groves.

California has a world compressed within her limits; a world in variety of climate, people, and customs. One can enjoy the grandeur of the Alps in the snow-crowned quiet of the Sierra. Nestling in her heart are valleys lovelier than e'er graced the Bavarian Highlands—valleys that far outrival the beauty of the Lauterbrunnen or Unterwald of the Bernese Oberland. A day's journey transports the traveler from the limits of eternal snows to smiling lands of waving wheat and golden plenty; another day southward, and they breathe the air of sunny

Spain, redolent with groves of citron, olive, and lemon, musical with notes of the mocking-bird and oriole, and odorous with mingled fragrance of orange and myrtle, and millions of roses, thicker than "leaves that strow the brooks of Vallombrosa," and revel in flaming colors of the deep-hearted cactus. A land wherein abides the City of the Angels.

In the streets of San Francisco you jostle against the stolid Englishman, indolent Spaniard, dusky Indian, Persian, Arabian, excitable Frenchman, bearded Turk, hardy Swiss, phlegmatic German, brawny Scot, genial Italian—in fact, all nations are gathered here in one cosmopolitan residence. Lastly, the moon-eyed Celestial abounds, and gives an air of picturesqueness to the streets, in his garb of dull blue, a pleasing spot of color in the universal array of somber black. The architecture is not provincial; many minds contribute to many styles, consequently the city is unique.

Dare sat at the window, looking out at the passing crowd, and making an effort to read. "I declare, Bulwer is a brick," she said, closing the book with emphasis. "Gentlema nWaife is a creation after my own heart. I've struck a motto—Guy Darrel's—'Dare all': it just suits me."

"I should prefer that you would insert a negative before the last word," Mrs. Brent said quietly.

“You are decidedly boisterous. A young lady should never forget her dignity of manner. You and your new friend Jones, I believe, acted like a couple of school-children the other evening; I was very much displeased. Mrs. Barnett remarked that ‘Sir John was quite shocked with American manners.’ She used a very insinuating emphasis on the last word. I do not admire Mrs. Barnett, and would rather you would be frank and honest than a simpering coquette, like Miss Lily; but I wish you would pay a more proper regard to society.”

“Mercury is ten degrees below zero,” Dare whispered, with a comical expression of distress, to Deb. “Mater, I know, with all Miss Lily’s sweet smiles and irreproachable manners, she is nothing but a doll. She is as precise as a marionette. Society is the string that governs her action and speech. O, dear! I can’t be proper.” She drummed on the window-pane listlessly, while Mrs. Brent, with a resigned sigh, resumed her work.

“Hallo, Deb!” she said, turning around, “Sir Richard is walking up this way, ‘a hunting for a partner,’ I suppose. Adios! I’ll go take a walk and cool off.”

“I am afraid,” Mrs. Brent said, with an annoyed expression, as Dare slammed the door, “nothing will curb her spirits but a great trouble.”

The door reopened. "Mater, Jack wants me to go down to the stable, and look at a new horse he thinks of buying."

She disappeared before Mrs. Brent found time to answer, while a loud ring of the door-bell absorbed their attention. Deb dropped her work in distress.

"It is Richard; and we have quarreled, and I don't intend to give in," she affirmed decidedly. "It is so troublesome to quarrel."

Aunt Judy came to the door. "A gentleman to see you, Miss Deb."

"Very well; I will be there soon."

Deb had an uncomfortable way of blushing on the slightest occasion; especially when she longed most for cold dignity, the blood would surge up into her cheek, until she appeared like the veriest school-girl. She walked to the parlor door, stopped a moment before entering, looked in the glass, pressed her lips firmly together, and finally went in.

"Good morning, Mr. Barton," she said, in tones so freezing that they might have been tinged with blasts from "Greenland's icy mountains."

"Good morning," he replied.

They occupied chairs in diagonal corners of the room.

"The weather is very delightful, after the rain,"

Deb continued, by way of introducing a novelty in conversation.

“I find all of the clouds have not disappeared.” he replied laconically.

“The sun shines quite brightly,” Deb added, with increasing dignity, although her lips trembled a wee bit.

“Weather depends a great deal on the state of mind, Miss Brent. I have walked down this hill in storms, yet the weather seemed pleasant to me.”

Deb did not deign to reply, only turned impatiently away, twisting the fringe of the window curtains around her fingers nervously, hiding her face that Richard should see no traces of feeling written there.

Men and women so often ruin all their lives by disguising their true hearts: by a little silence, when a word or look would close the narrow breach, which, if left unsaid, will open wider than the Roman chasm that engulfed Quintus Curtius, and swallow happiness, hope, all that life is worth living for, helplessly within.

Deb was standing on the edge, and pride was ready to give her a helping push.

Richard looked very grave and stern, his genial manner had vanished.

“Good by, Miss Brent. I am sorry things

should come to an end between us; but I have thought the matter over well, and have concluded, if a woman cannot regard a man's wishes and just requests before marriage, they had better part. It will be better for both of us." He bowed gravely, started to go, but looked back once.

A rift of sunlight had crept in between the shutters, and fell athwart Deborah's golden hair, rested on her white forehead, and lighted up her blue eyes. It was a very troubled face that it revealed—a face strangely at variance with the icy manner.

The eyes were misty with tears; two or three drops rolled slowly down the dimpled cheeks and fell upon the clasped hands.

Kindly, little, stray sunbeam! Thanks to you, a heart was thawed.

Mr. Barton retraced his steps, and going near, took one of the white hands in his. "Come, Deb, let us end the farce. Life is too short to be spent in silly bickerings. Confess you did wrong.

He drew a chair near.

"I am sure I have nothing to confess." Her voice had an ominous quiver.

"But you know it was wrong to let that puppy pay you such marked attention. There are rumors down town of his being a bogus lord."

No answer but a stifled sob.

"Well, Deb, let's both confess, kiss, make up, and begin again, like small children."

"Remember, you are doing the confessing." Deb looked up with a smile on her tear-stained face.

"I will acknowledge you women are like lucifer matches: you go off at the slightest touch, and often there's the de'il to pay."

"O, Richard! I did not know you were profane."

"The occasion demanded it, my dear."

"Richard, I have been dying to ask you, but you looked so forbidding. Was your article accepted in the 'Scientific Monthly'?"

"Yes; and with a very comfortable check accompanying. Now, I am going to ask when a certain day may be."

"O, Richard!" Deb blushed. "Winter is nearly over. Lent commences soon, and nobody is married in Lent."

"A blind decree of fashion, my dear. Of course, you would never outrage propriety by a wedding out of season. I wish you possessed a little of Dare's unconventionalism."

"You should have chosen Dare, then," she answered, pouting.

"She is a little too startling for a man of studi-

ous habits. I think she has a penchant for the Doctor or the young collegian."

So they kissed and made up, but were startled by a loud peal of laughter.

"Bless you, my children, bless you," Dare cried, opening the door suddenly on the lovers' tableau. "Have you seen Jack? I am in a constant state of search for that worthy. I am going down town."

"Wait awhile," Deb said. "We will all go together on our shopping excursion, then to the picture galleries afterwards. You have such good taste in dress, Dare."

"Cerberus accepts the sop. Flattery conquers us all alike. Even Mr. Richard seems to have felt your subduing influence."

"I am perfectly content to abide under it forever," he replied, pressing Deb's hand tenderly.

"I am going to the stable with Jack, and will meet you in an hour. I allow that time for loving. I am more generous than the ordinary railway regulation—twenty minutes for refreshments. I should think that was enough for sweets also."

"Dare, if you don't go, I will throw this book at you," Deb said savagely.

"Don't, pray. It's a copy of Debrett. I have been searching for Sir John's family. They are not, so far."

After Dare had taken her departure, Mr. Barton said: "Deborah, I insist that our marriage shall take place in July or August, at the farthest. I don't relish the situation of being a second Jacob."

"Very well"—Deb cast down her eyes meekly—"I will ask mother."

"This is a matter for Deborah, not Mrs. Brent, to decide. I want my wife to depend on herself."

"You must remember, mother rules now," she retorted mischievously.

"Jack! Jack!" resounded through the hall. "Where is Jack?" Dare called.

Lel spoke up, "He has gone, and left word for you to meet him at the stable."

"Well, that is mean; but no doubt he has reasons. Tell Mater I'm off."

She hastily donned hat and cloak, followed him, and met him at the stable door.

"Come in," he said. "I think you are a pretty good judge of horse flesh, sis. This mare is a tremendous bargain. Man who owned her is going to Europe, so must get rid of her, and offered her to me dirt cheap. You must help beg Mater for the spondulix."

"What do you do with all your money, Jack? Mater gives you twice our allowance, and you make ducks and drakes of it."

"Bother, sis, a fellow must have money. A gentleman can't be stingy. I'm going to cut college, and make money, so as not to be obliged to account to the family for every five-cent piece," he said irritably. "I've a great admiration for Mater. She's a wonderful woman, but she pulls the reins a little too tight, and the bit cuts. She don't understand: a fellow must have it slack sometimes, or he's likely to rear. I'm not a baby any longer."

"Please, sir, the 'oss is ready." A hostler, evidently from "Lunnon town," from his disregard to the fatal *h*, touched his cap. They followed him into the stable, to a stall where the men were taking the blanket off rather a small, clean-limbed animal.

"O, Jack! She is grand!" Dare cried enthusiastically. "Dark chestnut is my favorite color."

"Here, old girl, stand still." Jack patted her glossy side.

"I tell you, she'll be a flyer, sir," the hostler interrupted. "She'll be three year old come next Christmas; she's done her mile in 1.45 now."

"And is better than a gold mine," Jack added, as the man left them.

"Hallo, there! Is it you, Brent," a voice called from the street.

"Just been wishing for you," Jack responded heartily. "Want your opinion in an important matter."

“I am afraid my opinions are more frequently given than requested.” The speaker laughed as he came nearer. “Advice is something very pleasant to the giver, but generally most distasteful to the receiver. It is one thing given gratis humankind will not thank you for, however needful they may be.”

“Cynical as usual, Dartmore; but pray stop moralizing and look at the mare.”

“Excuse me, I did not see you, Miss Dare.” He bowed, and bent over to the animal, critically examining all of her points. “I am surprised that you prefer to look at a horse this beautiful day instead of satins.”

Dare simply shrugged her shoulders in reply. A safe gesture, capable of being interpreted as the speaker should choose.

“She was imported direct from Kentucky, a branch of the old Lexingtonian stock.” Jack was explaining and recounting her “lang pedigree,” when young Jones entered unexpectedly, and started at seeing Dare.

“Are you considering whether you will ‘give a kingdom for a horse,’ Miss Brent,” he inquired.

“I wouldn’t like to be put to the test, if I had one, for I possess a decided weakness for horse flesh, and this one is glorious. See how she tosses her

head defiantly; her form is as graceful as a young deer; her eyes are so intelligent and soft—excuse the prosaic application, but a Jersey calf is the only possible simile available. A calf by any other name would be ‘a thing of beauty, a joy forever.’ She looks like a horse to have a history, to be ridden by a knight: a second Bayard, worthy of a latter-day Rinaldo. She is out of her element in a close stable.” Dare stroked the long dark mane which fell over the arched neck, while the animal pawed the floor restlessly. “I would like to be on her back, somewhere in the country where it is fresh and breezy. She looks as if she were able to swim the bay, and carry one over the world.”

The horse turned her head around, and rubbed her nose against Dare’s sleeve.

“See!” she exclaimed delightedly. “She knows already that I love her. Animals and children have fine instincts in regard to their friends. The former always take to me; as to the latter, it is doubtful. I think I prefer animals: you can drop them when you are tired; but children are like burrs, the harder you shake the tighter they cling.”

A pause ensued in the conversation, and unintentionally Dare heard Mr. Dartmore’s parting advice.

“Women and horses are alike, Jack. Put not

your faith in either. 'Frailty, thy name is woman'; therefore, trust no female thing."

"Our sex is very much obliged to you for your high opinion." And Dare's gray eyes flashed ominously.

Jack, smelling danger, said: "What shall we call her? Your name will just suit her, Dare. My mare shall 'dare all, and win all.'"

"Don't poach on my preserves, and capture my motto; but I will accept the last addition. Give me the honor, and I will dub her 'Bayard,' after the prince of horses, as his master was a prince among men. I must go now; the girls will be waiting. We can all meet at the art gallery afterwards. Come, Jack," she called, in an impatient tone. "I detest that man thoroughly," she said, when they entered the street. "Who and what is he? He is a mysterious, sphinx-like creature, looks both young and old, and possesses an impenetrable air that would delight the heart of a dime novelist. His eyes are rather fine for a light man. Nature concluded to make up in looks for other lacks; but I don't like his mouth, it has such a cynical, bitter expression, as if the almonds had turned out only peach stones in his existence. Bah! He irritates me, as he towers in his superior statue above us, and smiles with a sort of patron-

izing air. I feel a creeping sensation when he is near. Who introduced him to us?"

"Forgotten; but you are nonsensical, sis. I reckon the world has given him some pretty hard knocks. He hasn't many airs and graces, and he hates women, I think, although he is not given to airing his opinions. You are the only one I have ever seen him speak to."

"He don't do that civilly."

"Well, he has been knocking around in India for several years. I suppose it wears the polish off. None of us knows much about him. He sort of took to me, and he stands by a fellow, sis."

"I know it is his influence that has changed you lately, Jack," she said, laying her hand tenderly on his shoulder.

"Nonsense!" He threw it off impatiently. "I'll weather it through in spite of Dartmore or any other man. Jones is awful sweet on you; and that mummy of a doctor. But, Dare, Dartmore beats the whole lot. He's got grit. The other night we were down at the club, having a quiet game of cards. Dartmore was leaning back in a chair, apparently reading. The illustrious Sir John cribbed a few counters, and Dartmore stepped up to him and said: 'Sir, we are gentlemen here. I will trouble you to hand over those counters.' The

other fellows had snobbishly refused to notice his lordship's indiscretion. Sir John stammered something about a mistake. I expected a row, and waited with Dartmore for a challenge at least; but Albion's chivalry didn't seem to hunt up a vindication, so we left."

"I don't doubt your assertions, but you are apt to be prejudiced. If I should have to die an old maid—which I don't consider a terrible fate, although I have no mission—I would never marry him. The old Doctor would be fifty times better."

"Look!" Jack laughed. "He is approaching."

Although but a week had passed since a rain-fall, the streets were filled with clouds of dust, eddying and whirling in small cyclones. The north wind is an anomaly in California. It sweeps down the Sacramento plains, gathering dust and heat, and when it reaches the bay city it is stifling to mind and body. It parches the skin, and successfully shrivels up ideas.

The Doctor, propelled by the wind, was hurrying on with great speed. His coat, of unfashionable length, flying like sails in his wake, and his hat, like a naughty will-o'-the-wisp, dancing before him, always eluding his grasp. Now he almost had it. A fresh gust blew it into the middle of the street, much to the delight of some young hoodlums on

the opposite side, who applauded its antics hilariously. His eyeglasses fell off, and while he was striving to replace them, another gust blew the tantalizing article directly in front of Dare. She picked it up, and as the Doctor looked up he saw her. A blank expression of amazement spread over his face.

“Really, Miss Brent,” he stammered, “I assure you—”

“Never mind,” she answered cordially. “Hats will be refractory sometimes.”

“These California winds far exceed those in strength that blow across the *tierra caliente* of Mexico. I was just anticipating the pleasure of a call on you, Miss Brent, but many obstacles seem to prevent the accomplishment of my design. The day was so very unfavorable, I did not suppose a young lady would defy this unpleasant blast,” he said, in his peculiar, slow, dignified manner.

“Ah, Doctor! we San Francisco girls are not noted for our complexions; we can stand it, and then resort to *creme de lis*, or some other whitening process. Invention far surpasses nature now a days, you know.”

“I assure you,” he responded warmly, “I have seen as fair roses and lilies blooming in the cheeks of San Francisco young ladies as ever adorned the groves of Mexico.”

"All a delusion: carmine and lily white are great deceivers to the unpracticed eye."

"May I accompany you on your walk?"

"I am afraid I shall be obliged to refuse, because we are going shopping, and I know your taste only runs to pre-historic garments and feather-work."

"I shall promise myself the pleasure later, then." He bowed gravely, and left them.

"What a prim old owl the Doctor is," Jack said. "Why can't you be as agreeable to Dartmore?"

"Because he is odious to me."

Dartmore was walking rapidly behind them, and overheard Dare's last words. His face flushed, and he bit his lip angrily. "It is the way of the world," he mused bitterly. "Those you care for most, and endeavor to aid, sting the cruelest. It is the old fable of the man and the viper, over and over again."

"Jack"—he spoke loudly, to attract their attention—"we are due at the club at three; I must part you from your charming company."

Dare walked rapidly ahead. "Sis is in a huff," Jack half apologized.

"All women are fond of that sort of thing. She will recover."

"What do you want me for?" Jack demanded. "I've an engagement to go over to the race-track with the boys to-day."

“I know, but they are such a dissipated lot,” Dartmore persuaded. “I don’t like Sterns’s manners or morals. He’s a dangerous man. Let us try Bayard in the Park.”

Dare’s thoughts were very bitter against Dartmore. She began to recognize a dangerous rival in Jack’s affections—one distasteful to her.

Hugh Dartmore’s nature was entirely antagonistic to hers. He was a cold, reserved man, with stern manners; while she was a warm-hearted, impulsive woman, with an especial aversion to being dictated to—two kinds of character ore which would require a vast deal of smelting through fiery trials to produce amalgamation.

Life had been to Dare a pleasant stretch of meadow land, full of fragrance of flower blossom and radiance of bird songs; a land wherein the sun was never dimmed. Very few obnoxious weeds had ever grown in her pathway, and such as she found were easily rooted out and cast away. Her nature was like a new pasture—strong but untried. What the yield might be, after the plowing, was unknown.

Hugh Dartmore’s life had led him amid sloughs of despond and brakes of despair. He had passed through them all, scarred, it is true, and had finally attained the restful uplands by strength of will;

still the air was tainted with the malaria of the past—the mire would cling.

He had become a pure fatalist, drifting carelessly with the tide, unheeding where it might strand him, oblivious of the end.





CHAPTER IV.

FOREBODINGS.

AS the three Misses Brent, armed for shopping, turned a corner, they perceived Dare standing quite still, gazing abstractedly at the passers-by, her mind still engrossed with the imperfections of luckless Dartmore.

“What are you doing?” they demanded.

Looking annoyed and surprised at their sudden appearance, she answered: “Bracing myself up to the emergency. O, dear! there is Miss Lily and her mamma. ‘How misfortunes crowd upon us.’ You see, girls, I am absorbing Mr. Jones’s aptness for Shakspeare.”

“Do be amiable,” Deb implored, in a whisper, as Miss Lily neared them.

“So glad to meet you!” she gushed. “I want you to come around to our reception this evening. It will not be very interesting, for Sir John cannot

come." She rolled up her violet eyes bewitchingly, which completely upset Dare, who said aside to Lel, "she is practicing on us women, so as to be ready for any wandering masculine."

"Tell your brother to come," she continued, "and bring his interesting friend, Mr. Dartmore; I am longing to meet him. Am I not, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear," that worthy duly replied.

"He hates women," Dare curtly remarked.

"Shocking," Miss Lily's innocent eyes said. "But we are ladies: it would not mean us, would it, mamma?"

"No, my dear," echo responded.

They entered the store together. Dare sighed.

"Verily, Dante's inscription would be very appropriate here. I pity these poor clerks. Think of having to pull down a thousand and one articles, answer numberless insane questions, and be compelled to smile blandly all the time: not even to have the privilege of indulging in one snappish retort, which is so dear to the masculine heart. It requires the soul of a hero to endure it. Job's patience is nowhere beside that of a dry-goods clerk's."

"How original Miss Dare is, isn't she, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear," fell mechanically from her mother's lips.

“That lovely blue satin just matches Deb’s eyes,” Lel cried, with enthusiasm; but when the price was named she put it down with a sigh.

“It would be ravishing.” Miss Lily gazed at it with a rapt, St. Cecilia expression. “Surely you will take it. It is very cheap: only four dollars a yard; mine was ten.” Miss Lily’s paternal had made a strike in Arizona.

“Remember, Deb, three hundred dollars means a complete trousseau,” Dare advised prudently. “Don’t be bulldozed into extravagance.” It was not altogether a disinterested admonition, for Dare was thinking of the price for the mare.

“This lace is very coarse: nothing like you can get in Paris,” Miss Lily remarked. “I will look at your gloves. No primrose color—what will we do, mamma?”

“Yes, my dear,” she answered absently.

“Some collars, then. These are too common I will take a yard of that gold ribbon.” And she concluded her purchases.

“Are you through, Deb?” Dare demanded. “I have wandered about until my head is in a whirl.”

“Yes,” she answered; “I will finish my shopping another time. Thank you.” She smiled politely to the salesman, while Miss Lily turned away from the counter piled with laces and silks for her benefit, with a supercilious air.

The man looked at them as if it was as hard work as solving one of Carlyle's problems, and sighed.

"We are going to the art gallery. Will you come with us?" Deb asked the Barnetts, politely.

Dare gave her a pinch under her mantle. "Certainly," they replied, after Lel had informed them some gentlemen friends would probably meet them there.

When they turned down Post Street, they saw the Doctor, like Hiawatha, 'standing lonely in the doorway,' watching for them.

"We are on time," Dare said, greeting him cordially. "Our pictures will be a relief to you, after savage specimens of art, I presume. I want you to explain the Aztec picture lore to me sometime, Doctor, when you have time."

His countenance fairly beamed with delight.

"I hope you will see some of it in its native country, Miss Dare. I shall return in the fall," he added innocently.

"I am afraid Mater will never consent to the trip. I long for a vision of Anahuac, Cordillera snows, and the tropical beauty of her valleys. I I am anxious to see a flower festival, but Mater imagines cobras lurk in every bush, and tarantulas in every corner."

"You become accustomed to it," he assured her, gravely. I frequently find scorpions in my sleeping apartments. They are interesting to study. You must go to Cholula, where you can see the finest remains of a teocalli." The Doctor waxed eloquent on his favorite theme.

Dare interrupted him, saying, "The others have left us, we must go on."

At the end of the gallery was a large painting representing a braw young fisherman seated on a rock, with a net full of iris-hued fish. Near him, a maiden leaned, with an imploring expression in her eyes, as if to allure him to the deep waves from which she had just emerged.

"This is good," Dare affirmed, standing before it.

"How can you?" Miss Lily said, pulling her dress. "The figure is not clothed."

"Nonsense! It is a beautiful work of art. Clothes don't belong to people, anyway. They are only adjuncts. I suppose you would clothe Lorelei in green tarletan, imitation coral, and pearl beads. The poetry is lost. Draperies are well enough in the abstract; in the concrete, they are stiff. Gathers and plaits would spoil the symmetry of the figure. The flesh tones are perfect."

"It can't be Undine, can it, mamma? Because

I was Undine at the fancy ball, and I had a lovely lace dress over Nile-green satin," Miss Lily interrupted.

"No," Dare said shortly. "It is from a little poem of Goethe's 'Der Fischer.' The idea of the bloodless maiden is beautifully carried out. I have no patience with this silly affectation about the nude in art," she said, turning to the Doctor.

"Certainly not," he stammered.

"You are right, Miss Dare. I like your vindication. I am a dauber myself, at times, and like to hear the purity of art upheld."

Dare turned suddenly, surprised at Dartmore's voice, and answered in haughty tones, "I feel complimented by your approbation."

He appeared not to notice the sarcastic emphasis she placed on her words, and continued: "I want you to see Hill's new landscape. It is very fine. There is such a suggestion of breeziness in it. He handles sunshine and shadows well. The distance is capital. Also, here is a marine of Yelland's, worthy consideration. The effect of the water is so real that you feel as if you could plunge your hands into it. These two artists should have a national reputation; but it is the worn story of 'the prophet.' Art is my one enthusiasm, Miss Dare, and I recognize a kindred spirit," he said pleasantly.

When he concluded, he walked across the room to Jack, while the Doctor and the Barnetts were making their adieux regretfully.

Dare felt decidedly uncomfortable, for she was perfectly aware that Dartmore's eyes were following her with a curious expression.

"He looks like a Mephistopheles at Jack's elbow," she informed Deb.

"Won't you come home with us to dinner, Dartmore?" Jack asked. But observing Dare's scowl, Mr. Dartmore replied, "It is impossible, for I have some writing to finish to-night."

"Sorry; then we must say good by."

After the evening meal was over they sat around the library table endeavoring to interest themselves in diverse occupations. Claire walked back and forth restlessly, encroaching on Dare's usual prerogative.

The silence was broken by Aunt Judy, who, with bandana awry, rushed excitedly into their midst, brandishing a broom wildly, as a Comanche does a tomahawk, followed by Ah Hoy armed with a scrubbing brush.

A broom is a very inoffensive domestic weapon, but in the hands of an irate female, it becomes an instrument of destruction, especially when it is new and the broom-corn stiff, and the hand unsteady.

“Mis’ Marg’ret,” she cried excitedly, “dat ole heathen done got after me ’cause I cotched him sprinklin’ de clothes wid his mouf. He had Mis’ Deb’s best clothes jest squirtin de water ober dem, so I jest goes up to him and ketches hole of dat long tail hangin’ down his back, and den he took up de scrubbin’ brush and jabbered away to me like he’d jest comed from de tower o’ Babel.”

The broom slowly resumed a downward position, and the old woman panted for breath. Ah Hoy stood by in supreme indifference, a slight expression of contempt in his almond-shaped eyes. “You no sabe.” He spoke quietly, while Aunt Judy fled behind Jack’s chair and shook her fist at him. “She come long, old black woman, catch me by the queue, pull so.” He illustrated. “Me no let Chinaman do that, me beat him. Me run after her. You pay me wages, I go. Me go, you get ’nother boy,” Ah Hoy repeated.

“Visions of Mrs. Flannigan’s woes and gin bottle rise before me. Entreat Aunt Judy to make up, Mater.”

“Go ’long wid you, Mis’ Dare. I’m not gwine to let eny heathen as ain’t fit to wipe my shoes on treat me so,” Aunt Judy said, with an offended toss of her head; “Ah Hoy mus’ go.”

“You have been taking in sand-lot doctrines,”

Jack spoke up. "I tell you, sis, let's do away with the Celestial. You are lazy, and now is the long-wished-for chance to build up fame in the kitchen line."

"You can have all the money saved, also, Dare." Mrs. Brent smiled.

"The mare!" Dare whispered, in a tragic aside. "All right, Mater, it's a bargain."

After quiet was restored, Claire mildly ventured to ask if some one would not like to go and hear the Rev. Mr. Varndall lecture.

Dare groaned. "This, then, is the object of sewing societies, Sunday-school classes, and missionary tramps. O, Claire!"

Mrs. Brent said: "I am sure he is a talented minister, and the lecture will be interesting. It is very proper that Claire should take an interest in such things. We will all gladly accompany you." She turned to Claire.

"I will stay at home and finish a drawing," Dare said decidedly.

"As I see Sir Richard coming, and you will be provided with a cavalier, I will beg off, because I have an engagement down town," Jack rejoined.

Everything he did was perfect in his mother's eyes, so she said nothing, but stifled a sigh as she looked after the straight, manly figure that went whistling down the stairs.

After they had all gone, Dare turned down the light, opened the shutters, and let the moonbeams flood the room; then drew a comfortable easy-chair up to the fire, placed her feet on the fender, and sat down to think. How the girls would have laughed to see her with her head resting on her hands, and her eyes staring at the coals with a dreamy abstracted expression! Like poor Punchinello, she was expected always to laugh and be merry.

Unfortunate wretch, he must sing and dance, though his heart be overflowing with grief; so with Dare, they would have laughed at her tears as a new joke.

Her family did not understand her. They never sought the mainspring of her actions, the delicate machinery of her mind was a blank to them; and in want of real life troubles, it was a great trial to her.

Instead of a trivial player, she possessed the elements of an earnest worker; but she was very sensitive, and generally sought to hide her feelings under a cover of forced gayety and abrupt speech. She was given to independent thought and independent expression.

Although not beautiful, she formed a pretty picture as she leaned back in the crimson arm-chair. Her hair had become disarranged, and fell over

her shoulders in a long, dark mass, straight as that of an Indian princess. Her eyes looked soft and dreamy in the firelight. Some crayon and a piece of sketching paper lay on a table at her side. "What is the use," she was thinking, "of trying to do anything?" (A reverie common to twenty summers.) "I can never reach more than the medium of perfection. I sketch indifferently, scribble still more so, am a failure at domestic duties—I am good for nothing. The world is full of mediocrity; there is so much good in it, and so little *very* good. When one commences to analyze one's own character, one generally reaches the lowest degree, and it is not improving to temper.

"I don't think people ought to be given ambitions and not power to fulfill them," Dare mused. Then, as if half ashamed of her daring grumble, she turned up the lights and commenced drawing.

"Heigho!" she sighed aloud. "My Pegasus has taken too lofty a flight."

"That is impossible," a quiet voice responded. "The only thing requisite is to 'keep a tight curb' on him, and not to make the voyage in great haste."

Dare looked up at the ceiling and down at the floor for the intruder, finally discovered him standing in the doorway. With a gesture of annoyance she tried to twist up her hair.

“You form an admirable picture as you are, Miss Dare. Pray don't spoil it. If you will lend me your crayon, I would like to perpetuate it.”

The soft look faded from her eyes, and was replaced by the old defiant expression as she said: “Have you descended from heaven above or risen from earth below, Mr. Dartmore. Like the fairies in Christmas pantomime, you have a faculty for appearing in unexpected places, and completing stray sentences.”

“I must beg your pardon. I appreciate your pretty simile of the fairies, instead of the usual imps who make their exits and entrances in the same way. I know you prefer the latter comparison. I was ushered in here by the servant; I came to find Jack. We have an appointment for to-night, and he has not kept it.”

He observed a smile of satisfaction cross Dare's face.

“I am going to invite myself, then, to trouble you for a short time to-night.”

“I am sure I did not think Mr. Dartmore could endure a woman's society, even for a *short* time.”

His face darkened, and Dare felt perhaps she had been a little too audacious. As he sat down beneath the gas-light it shone full in his face, revealing a finely shaped head, a countenance bronzed

by the sun and furrowed with many deep lines—lines of sorrow's plowing. A stern, resolute mouth, and dark eyes full of intensity and softness. His forehead was high and massive, shaded by a mass of fine, light hair. His was a face full of character, a face capable of much, but there was the restfulness of deeds accomplished wanting.

He smiled bitterly. "My life would not be the hapless wreck it is, but for a woman." Then bit his lips as if he had spoken a thought he wished concealed.

"I did not come here to bore you with myself, and pray don't imagine I am a melodramatic character, like one of Ouida's or Lawrence's creations. I want to talk with you about your brother. I know, through him, that you can be relied upon, and I also know that you regard me as an evil mentor. I should like to clear myself in your eyes. Why, I scarcely know," he said, with a scornful laugh. "I have let my character be blackened many times without an effort to prevent it. Whether it is a weakness or not, I want you to judge me fairly. I have taken a great fancy to Jack, although he is so many years younger than myself. I like his fresh, honorable nature; his only flaw is weakness. He looks at the world through youth's glasses, and is blind to its faults. I am afraid he has gotten in

with a crowd of bad associates, and now is the time when a sister's influence might save him. He is self-willed and obstinate, so you must skillfully conceal your purpose."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Dartmore," she answered haughtily. "We Brents are independent, and capable of looking out for ourselves. I agree with you entirely: visits to the club, and certain company, are not conducive to a young man's well-being."

"I see, Miss Brent, I am misunderstood." He rose. "The place of an adviser is not a sinecure. You have taught me to attend strictly to my own affairs, but"—he looked at her earnestly and searchingly—"Dare Brent, you can save now if you will. If you disregard my warning, the sin be upon your own head."

Dartmore left the room abruptly, and walked out of the house. As he buttoned his coat and lighted a cigar, he muttered: "What is the use? All women are alike."

Dare resumed her occupation of staring into the fire, but her thoughts were more disturbed and moody. She placed her hands upon her temples; her head throbbed and ached. The words, "the sin be upon your head," rang through her brain as if a thousand cathedral chimes-were sounding them.

She felt equal to mounting the chestnut mare, roaming the globe over, to conquer foes or rescue distressed damsels and knights from donjons deep; but these insidious, hidden foes; these small vices that, like the devil-fish, enfold their victim in millions of tentacles until it drags them down to destruction. O, it was horrible! Dare shuddered; her thoughts almost maddened her.

The door opened suddenly; she pressed her hands over her eyes. Jack appeared. She rushed to him, flung her arms around his neck, and sobbed outright.

“What’s up, sis?” Jack looked perplexed, for he had never seen Dare in tears save when he tore up some of her sketches in their pinafore days.

“Oh!—Jack—I—don’t know,” she laughed hysterically. “I thought you were murdered, drowned, or something dreadful.”

“After all, you are like all girls,” he said, with proper masculine scorn.

“That odious Dartmore has been here preaching to me about you, and it’s upset me,” she said indignantly.

“He better stop interfering. I reckon he hasn’t been so all-fired good. I’ve been to the theater, and a lot of fellows are getting up a fishing excursion to Shasta. I must go. You fix it with Mater.

I've bought some stock from Sterns. He says I'll realize twice the amount in a month; but I want cash now."

"It isn't fair; I always have to 'fix with Mater.' You know she is the only person I stand in awe of."

"You needn't then, I'll borrow of Sterns," he replied, in a huff.

"No, Jack, never borrow. I was going to the art school this winter, but you can have the money."

"The mare isn't settled for yet."

"Mater came down nicely for that. What did you do with it?"

"I paid half, and the other—well, I don't know, in fact. I did give an oyster supper to some fellows. You ought to have seen Sterns; he was gloriously tight." Jack laughed heartily at the recollection.

"I hope you didn't follow his example," Dare said, in pained tones.

"Bet you I didn't; champagne makes me sick."

"I will go to work and try and sell some sketches," she said quietly. "I would rather part with a hand than the mare."

"Mater would explode at the mere idea of a Brent selling anything; but I say you are a brick, sis. I will pay you twice back when my stocks go up."

Promises are recorded every day—"when the

mystic ship sails into port,' 'when luck comes'—promises light as the bubbles children blow on a summer's day; iridescent, with bright hopes and fair coloring, as Venetian glass, like it, also, brittle and evanescent.

Dare's face looked worn and weary as she turned again to the fire, for her idol was tottering on his pedestal.

"Dare! Dare!" a chorus of merry voices called, "the lecture was splendid. We are so sorry you missed it. Mr. Varndall is perfectly lovely."

Dare listened to their chatter awhile, then left the room.

"What is the matter with her?" Deb inquired. "She looks as if she had seen a ghost."

Yes. Ghosts of what might be haunted Dare's vision and tortured her brain. Ghouls more hideous than 'ere walked the solemn churchyard, because more intangible, with the vast mystery of an unknown misery clinging round their grave-clothes, and a possibility of some dire future, more terrible to the mind than the apparitions which greeted the Rosicrucians' gaze "on the threshold."

Ghosts that would walk, and she could not lay. Ghosts over whose remains she would sing a requiem; but a resurgam sounded instead.

The words of warning still rang in her ears, and she hated Dartmore with a deep, holy hatred.



CHAPTER V.

A TRIP TO SHASTA.

IN the natural order of events, clouds precede sunshine, calms storms, and unfortunately packing, traveling.

Visions of fair lands, divine, careless days and glorious nights, flit through the voyager's mind; while a glad feeling of freedom possesses his heart, and he longs to emulate the birds, and fly. The thoughts of other scenes serve as a panacea for the vague unrest that dwells in every mortal's breast, and he surmises each time that he is on the right quest for the Happy Valley.

His face falls when he muses on what must come before—the effort to pull the traditional camel through the needle's eye, the packing of manifold garments into a space half the requisite size. Then follows the checking, changing, watching, lastly smashing, which all good trunks and valises must submit to. Then he fully realizes there is no “joy without alloy” in this mundane sphere.

Jack was watching the packing process, manfully bossing and grumbling alternately, while Dare was striving with a *mélee* of rubber boots, fishing reels, boxes of gay-colored salmon flies, cans for bait, and a thousand trifles man considers necessary for his lordly comfort and the fishes' destruction.

"Hurry up, you will keep a fellow standing around all day. I must go and see about a new combination reel Jones told me about," Jack said impatiently.

"I am going to stop until you have everything ready. I haven't provided for additions, and this valise hasn't the capacity of an *Oliver Twist* or *Utgard Loki's* drinking-horn."

"I will be back in a half-hour at the outside. I want to ask Dartmore about some snells. By the way, he and Jones are going with me."

After he had left the room, Dare bent over her packing industriously, but a few tears trickled down on the gray yarn socks as she folded them in place. "Dartmore was going. The shadow that never left Jack. He is already estranged him from me," she thought. "Men are so selfish. Jack does not care about my disappointment, but he feels sure of repaying me. It is not selfishness, but thoughtlessness," she reasoned.

Women never reason from the brain, but

from the heart. The sex produces very few Portia-like advocates; and her pleadings, after all, were prompted by the heart, merely controlled by the brain.

The following morning the house was in as great a confusion, and farewells were as heart-rending, as if Jack was going on a long continental tour. Aunt Judy threw her arms around him, and said, "Take keer of yourself, honey, and come home soon. Law, Mis' Marg'ret, 'pears like t'other day I was nussin' them chillern. Mis' Dare allers was cross and colicky, but Mars' Jack crowed all de time. Nôw lookat him: grewed up to be a fine young man. Bress his heart!"

Her eyes filled with honest tears as she turned away.

"Aunt Judy," Dare called, "you didn't finish about me."

"Good morning, Miss Dare," Mr. Jones saluted her, coming up to the group as they stood at the door; "I wish you were going with us."

"Wait until I get my hat, and I will accompany you all as far as the boat."

Jones blushed, noticeably with delight. Alack, poor Jones! The wicked Eros had evidently pierced his heart with a stray shaft.

"Take care of yourself," Mrs. Brent said. Like

Aunt Judy, she could hardly realize the babe was grown.

Mothers so often make the mistake of keeping boys too closely within bonds. A woman cannot understand how loathsome restraint is to them; and it frequently hardens their character instead of softening it. When freedom comes, it is so new it intoxicates, bewilders them, and the consequence often is an empty nest, a broken heart, a lost child.

The molding of children's hearts and minds is an awful responsibility. When a sculptor finishes his creations, they are complete. He sends them out into the world; the pure marble stays as it was fashioned. A soul molded wrongly not only remains imperfect, but the defects grow, and it is not only a piece of work ruined for earth, but for all eternity.

Dare saw Dartmore awaiting them, and she bade Mr. Jones and Jack good by hurriedly, coldly nodded in Mr. Dartmore's direction, and walked away.

He looked after her with a pained, curious smile.

"I am afraid, dear heart," he thought, "like all pride, the fall must come to you as to us all."

"Thank goodness, we are well rid of the women folks." Jack lighted a cigarette.

"Some of the rest of us, judging by Jones's expres-

sion, are not so thankful." Dartmore glanced slyly at Jones, whose eyes were following Dare's rapidly retreating figure.

"I think we will have good sport this year; the waters are high, but rapidly sinking. Sterns told me Shasta is a favorite resort of his," Jack said.

"Is he going up," Dartmore demanded.

"The country and fish are free, I reckon," Jack sulkily replied. "He won't be up until next week."

After crossing the bay, they started on their long, dusty railway trip, the monotony of which was only broken at intervals by the dulcet tones of the train-boy calling out cherries, papers, Napa soda, in rapid succession. Men are stupid companions in traveling. They are such practical beings. They walk restlessly to and from the smoking-car, buy every article the newsboy thrusts upon them, read a paper, smoke a little, growl still more, smoke again, then finally settle down for a nap, until a sudden lurch of the train bumps their heads against the window, in consequence whereof they indulge in a little mild profanity.

Women note faces, and employ themselves by making character-studies. Bits of flying scenery interest them. They watch the white cottages as they pass by; mark the rustic fence with a country lad and lassie leaning over the rails, and perchance

whispering sweet nothings in the twilight. They weave pleasant Darby-and-Joan romances of their future. As night draws on, the twinkling light of some miner's cabin glimmers through the darkness, and they dream of the lonely occupant, and wonder if love of gold has made him isolate himself from his human beings. They ponder over their fancies, till the fog clouds over all, and outside seems a moving mass of darkness.

Enough: moralizing is digression. The travelers reached Redding about midnight, but even at that hour the heat was intense. By special arrangement they deferred their staging until the morning.

"This don't look lively for pleasure," Jack said dolefully, fighting an army of mosquitoes.

"Should think not," Jones responded, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself in a dew."

"If you had felt the sun in India at midday mess you would think this equal to breezes from the snows of Himalaya," Dartmore said. "I was baked there, thoroughly. I have seen the heat make everything glow with a white mist, and under the jungles the ground seemed to exude a steam. This is nothing."

"I didn't know you ever lived in India, Dartmore," Jones remarked.

“Yes, I knocked a bit around the world when I was younger.” He subsided into silence, then frowned as if he regretted having spoken. He had unwittingly referred to India, and India belonged to a past he wished to obliterate. A time which to think of, even now, made his pulse beat quicker. India formed a portion of a dark page in Hugh Dartmore’s life, which, if possible, he would tear out and cast to the winds, to plunge into the waters of oblivion. Memories are stubborn foes; they will steal like unwelcome guests into one’s thoughts, when least cared for, and rack the heart-strings. The slight insight Dartmore had into Dare Brent’s character affected him strangely, and opened old wounds afresh that he deemed healed.

Hugh Dartmore loved Dare Brent, although he would not acknowledge it even to himself, and it was solely for this reason he accompanied Jack on his trip. Unfortunately, Dare was a woman of strong prejudices, consequently oftentimes recognized evil where good was meant.

It was hard for Dartmore to spare the money. He possessed a small quantity of the filthy lucre, and was erratic in his pursuits.

He eked out a scanty existence by reporting for a paper; dabbled in art, modeled some, etched a little, then changed to oil or water colors. In fact,

he was a man of many talents—too many. So he frittered his life away. Painting was his natural element. He only needed the intangible spark to be a genius—the spark which oft evades the highest, and lodges in the peasant's breast, as it did in the heart of Robbie Burns when he followed his plow in the brown, bare fields. He possessed a high order of talent, but entire want of application. He was like a spar cast forth from a wreck, wandering aimlessly over the great waste of the world without purpose or plan. Rock-bound reefs oft wreck the spar; whether they would his life, the fates alone could tell.

“O, heavens! that one might read the book of fate!”

“Stage is ready,” next morning the landlord said. “All aboard!” the driver called. The knight of the whip was to the manner born, and soon they rolled rapidly on through clouds of sifting, penetrating dust towards the mountains.

By noon they reached Wylie's—a small, dilapidated shanty standing out in bold relief from the yellow dust of the stage road, on a hill covered with chapparal. Opposite, a long palisade of bare, gray rock, guiltless of clinging vine or shrub, was relieved against the hot sky, and reflected the glare back to the house. They were cordially greeted

by the host, formerly a steward on a Mississippi steamboat in their halcyon days of steamboating—a sufficient guaranty for a bountiful larder.

“Sybaris would shudder at these accommodations,” Jones remarked, when they were assigned their quarters in a bare, comfortless room papered with old illustrated weeklies.

“I am afraid it would sigh for its rose leaves,” Jack said, trying the bed. “Corn shucks, boys! O for the wings of a dove!”

“Better say feathers of a goose,” Dartmore rejoined.

“Even Symindrydes would have forgotten the rose leaves, and been content,” Jones said, as they entered the low dining-room.

O, shade of Lucullus, thou mightest well arise from thy grave, and gaze with envy upon the feast set before them.

Fried salmon, baked salmon, grilled salmon, dolly vardens in different ways, with various ravishing sauces, flanked by mealy white potatoes; tender green peas, translucent jellies, and Maryland biscuits. Chickens done to the turn, with *entrees* of giblets, brains, etc., in delicious mixtures. Lastly, the national dish of pie, and ripe wild strawberries, nestling in their own green leaves, waiting for a deluge of thick cream which stood by expectant.

“A feast for the gods; more toothsome than ‘honey of Hybla,’” Jones enthused.

“We are on Olympus; ambrosia and nectar are nowhere. But where’s Hebe?” Jack demanded.

“Voila at Jupiter’s call,” Jones laughed, as a nut-brown, mountain handmaid came in with a dish of cake. “Now comes in the sweetest morsel of the night.”

“Hear! hear! A truce to Shakspeare! It’s noon, my friend.”

“Dartmore, I never imagined you had so much life in you,” Jack said, after the meal.

“There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, O, Jack,” Jones interrupted.

“I like this,” Dartmore said, as they walked along the river after dark. “It is the greatest pleasure on earth to be rid of the conventionalities of life, away from the impurities of the city, alone with Nature.”

“Where every prospect pleases, and man alone is vile,” Jones sang.

“You are incorrigible. Let’s go to bed,” Jack yawned.

The next day the sun shone down brighter and hotter; but amends were made by the feast being repeated for breakfast, and by Jack’s consuming a whole chicken. —

They fell in with a party of fishermen, who wanted them to stay over and try the hole at the fishery, so they consented.

One of the party, the Judge, was a perfect disciple of Izaak Walton. He would have been a man after the angler's own heart, for he lived in fishing, thought, talked, and dreamed of fishing; regarded everything in life, as subordinate to this one great aim. He admired ferns, because maiden-hair was nice and cool to preserve his fish in. If he had been called upon to condemn a criminal, and found he was a good fisherman, he instantly would have found extenuating circumstances. No man could be utterly corrupt in his eyes who loved angling. With this worthy teacher, the three started off, equipped in brand-new costumes, with untried tackle, much to the former's disgust, his wardrobe being composed of all the odds and ends of the rag-bag. Jack and Jones were novices. Dartmore fished like he did everything else—lazily, but well enough.

They arrived at the hole, and unpacked their traps.

“Salmon won't rise to these now,” the Judge said laconically. “You want grasshoppers or salmon roe.”

“I'll chase the festive grasshopper,” Dartmore volunteered. He captured them, by seeing some dirty Indian boys who were standing near.

The hooks were baited. Jack was quietly listening to instructions about keeping his line taut and playing him, but Jones was wild with excitement. He flourished his line wildly around, over his head. He was blind with excitement when the Judge drew in a fish. The crowd of interested Indians stepped back as his hook came in dangerous proximity. He felt a heavy weight. A yell of triumph rent the air. He pulled; the line snapped. He looked: a yellow pup was disappearing in the distance at two-forty speed, with a line trailing after him. The change from exultation to dismay in his face was comical. Jack rolled in the dust, and roared. Even the Judge smiled; but Jones gazed mournfully after the retreating canine.

“A tremendous haul, old fellow.” Dartmore slapped him on the back; but Jones subsided into quiet for the rest of the day, dropped his line into the pool, and waited silently for a nibble. He was rewarded by a solitary cat-fish.

“Now, Jack,” said the Judge, “mark that swirl of water, there where it eddies above that sunken rock. Cast your line a little above—so. That is right; reel out. Let the current take your line. Now you have him,” as the lithe pole bent to the water’s edge. “Gently, my lad. That split bamboo and stout leader stood you in good service then.

Remember, you can't throw a salmon over your head." A mighty rush made by the now thoroughly angry and frightened fish disconcerted Jack to such an extent that the rod was thrown forward in the direction of the flying fish.

"Give him the butt," yelled Dartmore.

"Check him, or he'll snap the leader like pack thread," admonished the Judge. "Check him more; press your thumb on the line."

"But it burns," muttered Jack.

"Hang the burn," exclaimed Dartmore; "we must not lose our first fish. There he breaches; give him the line." As the fish shot out of the water, throwing a thousand sparkling water drops from his glistening sides, shook his head angrily, and fell splashing in the river.

"Check him again," the Judge cried. "Hold him so; the leader will stand it. Look out, here he comes. Reel in faster. Keep your line taut. Well done, my boy. Now he's sulking." The line became stationary. "Two to one he has his nose buried in the sandy bottom. Stir him up; don't let him rest. There he goes again. I tell you there's no music to a sportsman's ears like that of the singing reel." Another breach. Another shower of diamond drops.

"Keep his head up stream, Jack, and you've got him."

By this time Jack had acquired sufficient knowledge of finny tactics to hold his own against the enemy; and after a hard-fought battle of half an hour, landed his first salmon. It turned the scale at ten pounds. Jones dolefully exhibited his three-inch cat-fish. "That lets me out," he growled, in disgust. "I've caught a cat and a dog; that's enough for one day."

The Judge came back, amply repaid for his trouble; and after Jack had consumed his regulation chicken, they left, wishing Wylie "long life and happiness."

"May your powers of cooking never grow less," Jones added.

"All aboard for Soda Springs!" the driver shouted. They obeyed with alacrity. Soda Springs. The very name breathed of coolness to them, while above them tier upon tier of pine-crested Sierras rose, heralding the glory to come.

The drive was beautiful; the weather improved. Cooling breezes swept down the mountain-sides, carrying with them the balsamic odor of pine and fragrance of flower bloom. They drove over roads 'neath overhanging cliffs of grayest granite, bordered with clumps of purple and white ceanothus swaying in the wind. They wound around mountains whose summits towered into cloudland. Below

them yawned chasms, along whose depths streams glistened and gurgled, with snow-fed waters clear as crystal, whose banks were fringed with tangles of bracken and fern thickets, around which the wild grape-vine curled its sinuous arms of tender green, and almost smothered the eglantine in its close embrace.

Golden-rod, saucy pansies, bright buttercups, gay mariposa's flecked with brown, mingled with purple of larkspur and maroon of calacanthus, skirted the spots of emerald meadow lands. Creamy azaleas, and rhododendrons more fragrant than zephyrs that blow o'er meads of Asphodel, hid in every imaginable nook, coquetting with the breeze. Nature seemed singing in a golden harmony, for yellow flowers abounded. She seems to love the golden hues, because nearest in color to the blessed sunshine.

Dartmore was entranced. "This air is the elixir of life," he murmured.

"Wait, Mister, till you taste that ere water; bet yer life this ain't nothin'," the driver said.

Twilight descended quickly and silently. The crimson sun set beyond the mountains, leaving a mysterious halo of light over the world. The color slowly faded. The pines crooned a low plaint, while the dove cooed a gentle good night to her mate

in the manzanita bushes. The mountain-quail whistled in the brush, and each man longed regretfully for the fifteenth of September. When the dew fell, the air was redolent with perfume such as Araby with her essence of crushed roses could never equal. Gradually it darkened, and slowly over the mountain-top blossomed the stars, large and golden. Nowhere can one find such glorious summer nights as in the Sierras. People who dwell amidst this grandeur must be a step nearer the Creator than the dwellers in valley lands. The heart must grow greater and fuller, the feelings more elevated and intense; for the air seems too pure to bear iniquity on its wings, the mountains too grand to support its burden.

Just before midnight a low, white building loomed up, like a Brobdinagian mushroom.

"Soda Springs!" shouted the driver, cracking his whip.

Dartmore sat outside, fairly drinking in the grandeur, forming new resolutions, and smoking a cigar. Jones and Jack were asleep inside; the Judge was dozing, and on being wakened up, exclaimed, "I was just landing a ten-pound salmon."

They all welcomed the comfortable beds; only Dartmore walked to and fro on the long veranda for an hour or so, inhaling the pure air.

With morning came an invitation to taste the natural soda-water.

They plunged the glasses into the spring, and brought them up full to overflowing with a liquid clearer than distilled dews, effervescing as champagne of Rheims.

They tasted: all the cobwebbed Burgundy hidden in the stone vaults of Europe could not rival it. They quaffed and quaffed again. It was condensed Sierra air, filtered and purified by moonshine until it reached perfection.

“If the gods had drunk of this, they would have forsaken Olympus and hied to Shasta,” Dartmore exclaimed enthusiastically, as he held up his goblet to the light, full of seething, crystal liquid.

“Good morning,” the Judge said, as he came towards them. “How do you like your morning dram, boys? It’s better than whisky, any day. Going fishing to-day?” he asked.

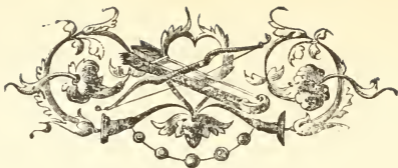
Jack and Jones readily assented, but Dartmore refused. “I will stay at home and furbish up the rifles. We may get a shot at a deer before we leave.”

“Laziness is a very ‘setting’ sin,” Jones retorted.

Uncle Dick, one of the characters of the place, said, “You’ll find b’ars, California lions, and some pretty long rattlesnakes in these mountains.”

“I will not try to improve my acquaintance with the latter,” Dartmore laughed; “the crotalus and I are on distant terms. All I want to do at present is to look, sleep, and drink—I will not say water, for it is no more to be compared to it than ‘moonlight unto sunlight, than water unto wine.’”





CHAPTER VI.

A STAY AT SODA SPRINGS.



WHO will chase the antelope over the plain?" Jack inquired loudly, the next morning.

"Hush!" Jones laid his finger on his lips. "Whisper it not in Gath. It is out of season. We seek the *ibex*—the same delicacy under a different name, you know; but then it sounds better, and is within the pale of the law."

"Ibex be it, then," rejoined Dartmore; "but first, here's for soda-water straight."

"I've a weakness for an occasional toddy in the morning."

"Let us make it 'heads or tails,' straight or mixed," said Jack, tossing up a coin.

"Tails—whisky. I am sorry; but my throat is accommodating."

"That water has washed away your cynicism Dartmore," Jones remarked.

“When I am away from the world I am blind to its follies,” he laughed, in response.

“I received a letter from Dare last night,” said Jack. “She wants you to send her your first fish, Jones. A ‘yaller pup’ would be rather heavy expressage, eh?”

Jones blushed, but made no reply, while Jack continued, apparently oblivious of his companion’s discomfiture: “She and the Doctor seem to be wonderfully friendly. She has the Aztec craze badly. I hope the old fellow won’t carry her off, and make her a Dorothea to his Casaubon. Dartmore, she seems to have acquired a prodigious aversion to you.”

“I have not generally found favor in the eyes of the sex,” he answered icily, and turned away.

“What, doesn’t Miss Lily Barnett rave about you? She smells a mystery—a lunatic wife or a tragic duel, in your past life.”

“She need not trouble herself about me nor mine,” Dartmore answered; “*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*” But somehow a cloud had fallen upon him. “Am I a callow youth that the likes or dislikes of a silly girl should shake my heart like a reed? What is Dare Brent to me or I to her,” he thought moodily; then turned to where they were preparing the horses.

"Everything is ready; let's toss for the horses," Jack exclaimed.

"Jack, Jack! You are an inveterate gambler," Jones remonstrated.

"Chance is a fickle goddess. Take care or you will come to grief some day," Dartmore warned.

"Whoa, Rosinante!" Dartmore commanded, holding in his horse, which was inclined to buck. Where is the pleasure of fishing compared to hunting? Fishing does for students and men of meditative turn of mind; but hunting is the sport for men of nerve and action. I killed a tiger once in India. That was *sport*. It was grand: crouching in the long jungle grass with the deep blue sky overhead. His green eyes glistened with fire, his tail lashed the ground, and his sharp claws were drawn from their velvet sheaths. I fought for my life, boys, and once I thought it was all up with me. He sprang upon me, and he buried his claws in my shoulder. (The scars are still there.) I could feel his hot breath on my cheek, but I made a last effort, and with the aid of a knife, and a native who was with me, I got the better of him. You have noticed his skin in my room, Jack. No, boys, you need not praise my courage," he said. "No honor is due to me. It was the native, and—fate. This is the first time I have hunted since, and that is the reason it occurred to me."

“Look !” Jack whispered excitedly. “Look !”

About a hundred yards in front of them stood a noble stag with branching antlers, with head up-raised, as if listening for a sound.

The dark mountain rose above him, and the soft morning light brought out the delicate covering of his supple form.

“Keep steady, boys !” Dartmore said. “Dis-mount noiselessly, and creep a little nearer.” He looked at Jack, who was trembling like a leaf; he was the picture of nervous excitement. The buck ague was upon him; and the bullet which sped from his shaking rifle shattered a pine branch twenty feet above the coveted prize.

The startled animal turned a swift look in their direction, then plunged down the mountain-side. Dartmore quickly threw his rifle to his shoulder; his bronzed cheek flushed a little, but the arm that supported the rifle was firm, the eye that glanced through the sights keen and sure.

There was an instant's pause, a sharp ringing report, and the deer sprang convulsively into the air, shot through the heart.

Jones was afterwards heard to confess, that for the time being he had forgotten that he carried a rifle.

A doe started from the adjacent thicket. Jack started to fire, but Dartmore caught his arm. “I

should as soon think of making war on women," he said quietly.

As the animal looked at them with glazed and dying eyes, Jones said, "By Jove! I feel as if we had slain a human being."

"You will get used to it," Dartmore answered. "You have indulged in the humanities too, lately. There is a good deal of stone left in our compositions, giving due credence to the Deucalion origin."

"I am afraid that I am a bit womanish about hunting," Jones replied.

"I like the Buddhistic doctrine of refraining from killing. Unfortunately, Buddha's great pity existed more towards beast than man."

"A truce to disquisitions mythological or religious," Jack called impatiently. "Let's on with the chase. I feel as savage as a Turk."

"The young man has his blood up," Jones said. "I don't believe in killing more game than we can use, so I propose to return."

"Second the motion," Dartmore rejoined. "Hunger is a powerful magnet that is just now drawing me towards Campbell's. We have not the proclivities of a Rabican, and cannot feed on air." Jack and Dartmore, with combined effort, raised the deer on the latter's horse, and swung him behind

the saddle. "Steady, you beast," said Dartmore, patting him on the back.

They rode slowly homeward. When the crowd assembled on the porch caught sight of the buck, they set up a yell, and crowded around the hunters with profuse congratulations.

Dartmore dismounted, and walked rapidly to his room.

"It's the way of the world," he thought, "to let great things go unnoticed—to let genius languish for want of a little approbation—while a trivial success of muscle or aim is lauded to the skies."

"Halloo, old fellow!" a familiar voice shouted to Jack. "I am glad you have been so thoughtful as to provide for our larder."

"Sterns!" Jack exclaimed, with astonishment. "When did you come up?"

"This morning," a short, thick-set man, with forbidding countenance, replied.

"Got caught in a little game, so concluded to light out for a space."

"Dartmore did the providing," Jack answered; and going near to Sterns, asked uneasily, "How's my stock?"

Sterns shrugged his shoulders.

"Rather down now, but I think she'll boom next week. By the way, I paid an assessment of fifty

dollars for you. It's a trifle, I know, but traveling expenses are pretty steep, and I'll have to trouble you for it. Say, who's your chum?"

Jack introduced Jones, and an invitation to drink followed.

"Fifty dollars!" Jack pondered, as he went to his room. "He might as well have asked for five hundred—I've only enough left to carry me home."

Jack's thoughts were not pleasant companions that night. He was young, but already an incubus of debt rested heavily on his shoulders. He closed his eyes, and Dare seemed gazing at him reproachfully. Then he felt angry with Dartmore.

"He talks to me as if I was a youngster."

He tossed restlessly. He realized Dare's sacrifice now, in giving up the art school, but comforted himself with the reflection that luck must change sometime.

Jack's grandfather had been shot at the gaming-table—accidentally, it is true; but the blood that coursed through the veins of his descendant held the same taint—the fatal love of gambling.

Dartmore's mind also was troubled, and he wooed the drowsy god in vain.

He felt annoyed at the new arrival, for Dare's sake. Then he said to himself:

"I might as well go back to my lonely nook in

Bohemia, and free my mind from anxiety concerning these people, who care nothing for me. Jack is headstrong and selfish; Dare— Nonsense; the motto of the human race is, 'every man for himself.' ”

Dartmore did not think, in his bitter reflection, that words were easy but their fulfillment hard.

Jones slept soundly and well. Life to him was as froth of summer seas, sunshine, and pleasure.

“Looking into things never makes you happier,” was his philosophy. “I detest those protoplasmic individuals who are always delving after first causes,” he would say.

At breakfast the next morning the Judge inquired, “Who was ‘sawing gourds’ so lively during the night?”

Jones looked sheepish, and the guilt was finally traced to his door.

A fishing excursion was planned for the day, but Dartmore excused himself.

During the afternoon he got out his sketching traps, and strolled to the top of a hill in front of the house. As he reached the summit, he removed his hat in mute adoration to the magnificent scene spread before him.

In front, the Trinity mountains stretched away into the blue in the distance. Here loomed up

the jagged battlements of Castle Rock, at whose feet nestled a beautiful lake. Pine, cedar, and oak clothed the mountain-side with their wealth of foliage, through which dark and gray rocks showed their weather-beaten fronts. Little meadows, sole descendants of the glacial era, were dotted in the rolling landscape, vivid in brightest green, and irised with flowers; while far below rushed the silver line of the Little Sacramento, pursuing its tortuous journey to the south. There Yreka Valley lay, bounded by the Oregon line and the Sierras, and from its plain towered the cone of Shasta, her hoary head covered with many winters' snows, stately as a giantess of old.

Her snows reflected that peculiar rose-tint travelers so often see in Alpine mountains.

Dartmore gazed entranced, then threw down his brushes in despair.

"Mere paint cannot reproduce that," he muttered; "like all my attempts in life, it would be futile."

For the first time in years Hugh Dartmore felt a genuine thrill of enthusiasm. He did not possess confidence in his own abilities. He deemed his ambition dead and buried. "For what use is it," he questioned, "for man to strive for fame? What does he gain by it? An empty breath—a name," he reasoned, cynically.

Dare Brent possessed ambition beyond her powers. Hugh Dartmore had the power, but ambition slept.

Dartmore packed up his untouched canvas, shouldered his rifle, and started down the hill.

The day was fading rapidly. As he looked up, he saw a blaze of color concentrate in the western sky, illumining Shasta's virgin crest. Then a few filmy clouds gathered round the horizon, and resolved themselves into long, tremulous bars of orange and purple, crowned by a halo of gold. Each mountain peak glowed as if its summit was lighted by votive fires to Ormuzd. It was like a transfiguration to Dartmore, emblematic of the brightness life might still hold for him.

He stood there silently, until the colors melted beyond the mountains, and the cloudlets shone in an after glow of violet-gray.

Slowly the last rim of the red sun disappeared. Shasta's peak grew cold again, and the clouds robed themselves in penitential garments of darkest gray.

Twilight merged into a dim weirdness, and vanished swiftly as cloud shadows on a moonshine night. The grayness darkened. Above in the heavens great planets throbbed, like beating of angels' hearts.

The Sierra air grew delightfully cool; its breezes redolent with pine fragrance. At last Dartmore sauntered slowly back to the hotel, his mind busied with higher thoughts and stronger resolutions.

“Nimrod will have to look to his laurels,” Jones laughed, when he entered the house.

The Judge noticed Dartmore’s annoyance at any remarks about his shooting, interrupted Jones, and entertained the company during the evening hours with reminiscences of his mining days in ’49.

Jack followed Sterns to his room.

Dartmore looked after him uneasily, despite his resolutions of the night before, and listened for his footsteps long after he himself had retired for the night.

O, Jack! if sleep and peace would not come at your bidding, what must your rest be to-night?

He lost his last cent to Sterns. He drank deeply to deaden the pain, and sunk on the bed in a heavy stupor.

Dartmore had painted a picture, on a venture, during his spare moments, and had laid by the requisite amount to frame it for the coming art exhibition.

Jones heard of Jack’s difficulty, and consulted Dartmore.

“If I had an extra dollar I would help him,” he said; “but the govenor has cut me a little short lately, and I have barely enough to cover the expenses of the trip.”

Dartmore made no reply; but in the course of the afternoon he said to Jack, in a careless tone:

“Old fellow, I have some change, if you are out of cash at any time. I don’t need it, so you must call upon me.”

You would have concluded that Dartmore had millions at his command by his manner.

Jack laughed uneasily. “I am very much obliged. If I didn’t accept I am afraid they would have to keep me in pawn here. The fact is, I have been a little unfortunate.” He flushed. “I must borrow to get home again.”

“Here it is.” Dartmore handed it to him. “You are perfectly welcome to it. Don’t worry about payment. Any time that is convenient to you.”

It was a great sacrifice to Dartmore, for even in California, the State of gold, money must be earned “in the sweat of the face—or mind.”

“You’re a brick, Dartmore,” Jack said; “I shall convince Dare of that now.”

Dartmore frowned. “I beg of you not to mention such a trifle.”

“We fellows are going to climb Shasta to-morrow. Won't you go along?” Jack asked.

“No, thanks,” he replied, “I have outlived my excelsior feelings. It's too hard work. I will wait for you here.”

The party returned from their trip wiser and sadder men. After the usual fatigue, giddiness, and suffering from snow-blindness that attends ventures of this kind, they had reached the summit, and had been rewarded by a view of a sea of mist.





CHAPTER VII.

“SWIFT AS A SHADOW, SHORT AS ANY DREAM.”

HEIGH-HO!” Dare yawned, throwing herself back indolently in an arm-chair. “What shall we do to relieve this monotony; I might just as well be an Andromeda, for all the fun going. Even she had some satisfaction in the way of an adventure, after all.”

“If you indulge in any more such yawns, even a Perseus would be daunted, and you might be left to the monster monotony,” Deb remonstrated. “I wish you would be quiet, I want to finish my dress. Mr. Barton and I are going driving this afternoon.”

“Mater has promised me a canter on Jack’s mare, if I will stand a groom for escort. I’ll promise our roads shall diverge if you will be lenient, Deb. Dear old Jack: I wonder where he is. Men do have the best of it in this world. Here we sit,

moped up in the house, while Jack is having a glorious time. Men are the oases in our existence. I don't mean the sex as a whole, but Jack is our particular green spot. I've been taking strolls out to the Park before breakfast, until flying milkmen, astounded butchers, and small boys gaze at me as if I were a Madame la Chapelle, out training for a go-as-you-please. Claire, you might as well accompany me, as to go to church every day."

"Yes," Deb interrupted, "but Claire has more agreeable company, perhaps, on her walk home."

"Good gracious!" Dare started up, and looked at blushing Claire with amazement and reproach.

"Et tu, Claire! I never thought lightning would strike twice in the same family. We must resign ourselves to the inevitable, and watch *Lel*. Think of it, my countrymen—a Mrs. Prof. and a Mrs. Rev." Dare laughed heartily.

"Take care, you will be caught, yourself, some day," Deb warned.

"I am afraid when the fisher landed me, he would repent of his haul, finding only a stingray."

"I think I see a fisher coming now." Deb glanced out of the window.

Dare looked over her shoulder.

"It's only the Doctor, who promised to show

me some ornaments found among the ruins of Montezuma's palace, and some MS. that he has been preparing on the subject. I only wish he came bearing the lost treasure."

"Mis' Dare, dat long-legged preacher wid glasses wants to see you. You tell him to go 'long. He's yaller as a Norf Carliny dirt-eater."

"He isn't a preacher, Aunt Judy; Claire has the monopoly on that score."

Dare ran down-stairs, whistling a tune softly to herself, but stopped discreetly as she entered the parlor.

The Doctor was attired with scrupulous care, and had even indulged in the sentiment of a rosebud in his button-hole.

Dare held out her hand. "Good morning, Doctor; I hope you have not forgotten your manuscript."

"No—no—my dear young lady," he stammered. "I have just received a letter, and I will be obliged to start for Mexico next month. I am exceedingly grieved to find my time so brief, but I shall endeavor to follow the ancient though homely proverb of 'making hay while the sun shines.'"

He stopped, coughed, took a silk handkerchief of flaming color from his pocket, and went through the imaginary task of mopping his forehead, as if he already suffered from Mexic suns.

Dare looked perplexed, but said: "We shall miss you very much. You must not forget my promised collection of pressed flowers when you are settled."

"Certainly not," he continued, rather disjointedly, staring at the ceiling in an abstracted manner. "I thought our tastes, possessing such similarity—that your art combined with my writing—would form a delightful partnership, and be such an addition to my great work. I assure you the task would be congenial to you. We could learn the stenographic art in leisure moments. It would be so much assistance to me in dictation."

Dare looked aghast at him. She could not understand the drift of his discourse.

"The partnership would be delightful, but the members of the firm would be too far separated," she said, innocently.

The Doctor smiled courageously, and drew his chair nearer.

"I want the partners to be very closely allied. My dear Miss Dare, my life has been so absorbed in study, I never expected to meet a woman with a congenial mind. From the time I was a youth, my father gave me John Stuart Mill and Carlyle as recreative reading matter. I absorbed literature with the air I breathed. When my mother died, my father

was a professor in a college, so we studied together, and delved into all kinds of ancient lore. After my father's death, I went to Germany, and devoted myself to scientific study. I found my mission was laid in the glorious kingdom of Anahuac, among the lakes, or the ancient basins (speaking more correctly) of Tenochtitlan. I wish to enlighten the race in regard to the Aztecs, feeling assured my reward will be as great as ever accomplished by unraveling the mysteries of the Assyrian tablets." The Doctor hesitated, looked at her with as much tenderness as if she had been an ancient tome, then said, "I would like you to share that great honor with me."

Dare looked at him. A ray of light burst upon her vision. She laughed uncontrollably. "Forgive me, Doctor," she implored; then went off in fresh convulsions, while he gazed at her as at one demented.

"I appreciate the honor," she gasped, struggling for composure; "the work would weigh upon me too heavily. I don't know anything about Mill or Carlyle, except by name. I am quite sure I could never master short-hand. I would only make a silent partner."

The poor Doctor, in his agitation and bewilderment, instead of producing his handkerchief from

his pocket, essayed the feat of wiping his brow with a hundred pages of loose manuscript. Needless to remark, the floor was strewn with relics—dis-membered thoughts.

Dare instantly stooped to gather them together, in order to hide her embarrassment.

“I am very sorry, Miss Brent,” he said, in hurt, dignified tones, “that you should consider my proposal a fit subject for mirth. I am sure you led me to believe that you wished to visit Mexico. Pardon me if I have committed an error.” He froze into stateliness. “You have wounded me deeply. I have placed you in the most sacred niche of my heart, and you will remain there for all time: like the love the natives bear for the memory of Montezuma, even when they spurn his weakness.”

“You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,” Dare repeated mechanically. “Forgive me, Doctor,” she said earnestly, as she noticed his expression of deep pain. She held out her hand. He hastily opened the door, and was gone before she could speak.

“Good gracious, Aunt Judy!” Dare called, “the Doctor has forgotten his hat. Run after him.”

She watched him receive it with a courtly bow, and saw, even from the window, that his eyes were

dimmed with tears. She sighed, realizing that one of her best friends had left her forever.

She went up to her room, to avoid the family. A sharp twinge of remorse and regret pierced her heart. "How Jack would laugh!" she thought. Then she felt a bit sober and penitent. "Lovers are not so nice, after all. They make one very uncomfortable. I intend to live in single-blessedness." She sat all the afternoon curled up in a chair, dreaming of a studio hung with gobelin tapestry, and furnished in mediæval style; and of pictures that would rival a Gerome or Fortuny in composition and color.

In the midst of Dare's reveries, the tramping of feet, and a masculine voice, sounded in the hall.

"Jack!" she cried, with a scream of delight, opened the door, and threw her arms around him.

"You receive me in regular grizzly fashion, sis," he remonstrated.

"You look rather thin." She eyed him critically.

"Too much exercise climbing the mountain," he answered shortly. "I should have listened to Dartmore."

"You look as if you had been accompanying him many nights in the dissipation I hear he is given to."

Jack did not answer, and changed the subject.

Dare silently scored another black mark against Dartmore's name.

The next morning, when Jack came down to breakfast, he found Claire with a pretty gypsy hat tied down over her curls, and a fancy basket swung on her arm, full of tiny bouquets.

"Where are you going, Lady Claire?" he saluted her.

"Only to the flower mission," she answered.

"When girls can't paint, play, or sing, it's fashionable to take to charity," Dare said—"charity as an art, with baskets of finest weft and costumes accordin'."

"And the greatest of these is charity," Jack murmured, as he left the house with a thoughtful mein. Poor Jack! he uttered it feelingly, for he had a heavy burden on his heart, and felt a longing and need for the divine attribute.

"Sermonizing is catching," Dare said. "What have you, Claire? I smell mignonette—pansies! Where did you find such a bonanza? Roses, too! I claim to be poverty stricken. Please indulge me. A Pauline is such a treat. What are you doing with forget-me-nots and camelias, carrying them to people with hollyhock and cabbage-rose tastes? Might just as well offer ice-cream to an Esquimaux. I detest flowers without fragrance. They are like

fashionable people—all show, with no soul in them. The perfume is the soul of a flower; and if it lacks it, it isn't worth a straw."

"Dare, I hope you are done with your Ophelia-like flower disquisition. Mr. Varndall received these from a friend in Oakland who possesses a hot-house, and wished me to distribute them."

"That increases their value, certainly; but if I were your poor people, I should feel very much as if 'I asked for bread and ye offered me'—a flower. If I was hungry, I should feel like pitching the roses at the giver's head. I would prefer St. Elizabeth's burden before the transformation. It's a mere newspaper romance about flowers bringing tears to old women's eyes. Most of them, I warrant, were never used to them, and something pleasing to the palate would bring more moving tears. However, good luck to you, Lady Claire."

Dare felt in a cross-grained mood. She had been decorating a sash for Deb's trousseau, and the oil would spread on the silk. Jack had snubbed them all, collectively and individually, and Mrs. Brent was very much annoyed at her refusing the Doctor's offer. He had already established himself well in the world; and Margaret Brent, although not mercenary, was very ambitious for her children.

Dare answered her reproaches.

“I couldn’t bear to be looked upon as an amanuensis, and live in ruins. I want to be loved for myself. I should become a raving maniac if I were shut up with Draper and Mill for companionship, and given a nibble at Bacon for *fete* days. Don’t be anxious to get rid of me for a while, Mater.”

Dare went up to her sanctum with a heavy heart, and opened a drawer where she kept her valuables, consisting of sundry juvenile poems, odd pictures clipped from papers, and a store of original sketches. She selected two or three carefully painted panels of groups of small figures, looked at them hesitatingly, wrapped them up carefully, put on her hat, and went out. She walked down town, past the picture stores, retraced her footsteps, but, courage failing, she went to the decorative art rooms.

“Will you please try and sell these for me, if you think they have any merit?” she asked the manager.

“Certainly,” he smiled; “they are in the French style—capital,” and handed her ten dollars.

Dare took the money and hurried out, her heart beating with exultation at the idea of earning anything by her own exertions. She nodded to the Barnetts haughtily as ever, as she came out of the door, although they would have fainted at the idea of a lady selling anything.

“O, Miss Dare!” the fair Lily exclaimed. “Have you heard the dreadful news? I have been prostrated by the shock, haven’t I, mamma?”

“Yes, my dear,” mamma dutifully answered.

“Sir John was not a lord, but a poor clerk. How awful to think of dancing with a *clerk!*”

“Yes, and angling for a clerk,” Dare thought to herself, very much amused.

“All San Francisco is distracted. The very best people invited him to their houses. He had the audacity to pay me attention, but you know I never could endure him. Could I, mamma?”

“Yes, my dear,” her maternal answered absently.

“Mamma!” Miss Lily said.

“No, no, my dear.” She looked at Miss Lily in bewilderment.

“If I had known his real character I should have cultivated him,” Dare retorted. “You must excuse me, ladies, I am in a hurry. I have been selling some pictures.” She could not resist giving them another shock, although she knew she might as well have published it in the daily papers.

“Selling!” Miss Lily’s eyes expressed horror. “Buying, you surely mean.”

“No: selling,” Dare repeated emphatically. “I am getting mercenary.” And she smiled at the idea.

“We girls must have larks sometimes.” Miss Lily smiled sweetly.

"I wanted the money," Dare replied bluntly, and walked away.

"I barely escaped a collision," Mr. Jones said, as he met Dare face to face. She was gloating over the discomfiture of the Barnetts, and did not notice his approach.

"I have not seen you since our return. Wie gehts, Miss Dare?"

"Slowly; but now that the Philistines are upon us, we hope to have times a little livelier."

"You seemed to be indulging in a little private jollity as I came near. Remember Friar Lawrence. 'Violent delights have violent ends.'"

"Won't you come home with me, and help ward off the ends."

"Thank you; but Dartmore and I promised Jack we would drop in this evening. We must console ourselves with thoughts of what is to come."

"You argue as children do about their dinner. They snub the bread and milk, waiting for dessert, which often turns out indigestible, and then they wish they had taken what was offered first. Our evening hours are filled with indigestible sweets—Deb and Claire. You have heard the mournful tale; I give you warning."

"'Fair Hymen,' so saith the 'Chronicle,' leads Miss Deb a captive soon."

“Don’t speak of it. We are passing through the various stages of dressmaking. These weddings and lovers are very troublesome when done up fashionably.”

“I differ with you. ‘Wedding is great Juno’s crown! O, blessed bond!’ The very name calls up to me visions of Cupid’s rose bowers and bright dreams.”

“It don’t to me,” Dare said, sententiously. “It reminds me of housekeeping, cross men, bills, worry, and very doleful dreams. Where is Lel going?” she said, as she looked and saw her alone, walking quickly through a crowd. “Good by, Mr. Mr. Jones, until this evening.”

Dare walked home rapidly, half wishing the idea of shocking the Barnetts had not entered her mind. She did not care for the gossip it would occasion, but “It will hurt Mater,” she thought; “and I can’t explain.”

Aunt Judy met her at the door, with her apron flung over her head.

“Honey lamb,” she sobbed, “go comfort pore Mis’ Marg’ret.”

“Is it Jack?” Dare asked, with dilated eyes. He was always first in her mind.

“No, chile,” the old woman cried; “not Mars’ Jack. It’s Mis’ Lel.” Then she broke down

again in a passionate fit of weeping. Dare brushed impatiently past her, and was met by Deb and Claire, with red eyes and tear-stained cheeks.

"What is the matter?" she demanded, looking from one to the other in amazement.

"What do you think has happened while you were out?" Deb whispered. "Lel has gone!"

"Nonsense!" Dare brightened visibly. "I have just seen her on Kearney Street."

"Mother has sent her away forever," Deb sobbed. "She says we shall never recognize her again. Lel was so quiet that we never suspected her."

"If you girls don't end this mystery or misery, I will go to Mater."

"Don't!" Deb clutched her dress, while her eyes filled with tears. "She locked herself in her room afterwards, and has forbidden us ever to mention Lel's name again to her. You know Lel went out for a walk every afternoon. She was so timid and quiet we never questioned her. It seems she used to ride on the California Street cars, and was attracted by a handsome conductor. You have seen him often. You called him Sir Galahad, one day, because he had such a distinguished air, and was always staring into vacancy, as if wrapped in dreams. You said you knew his mind was searching for the Holy Grail, by his expression.

“I remember now how kind he was to Lel, helping her on and off. Everybody had a tender way with her, she was so shy and innocent.” Deb pressed her soaked handkerchief to her eyes. “Well, they became acquainted some way. She told mother all about it. You would never imagine little Lel had so much spirit. She stood up before us all, and defended him bravely. Dare, it makes me tremble now to think how Mater looked. Henry the Eighth couldn’t have been more stern when he signed his death-warrants. Lel said she commenced to love him before they spoke. He had been a soldier in the late war, lost everything he possessed, and his family were all dead. That’s a comfort,” practical Deb added. “They might have been uncomfortable sort of people.

“He came out here hoping for better times, but misfortune and sickness had followed, like bloodhounds on his tracks. He had been obliged to take his present position or starve. She looked every inch a little queen as she stood defending him. The childishness was gone from her face. Only her blue eyes looked pleadingly at mother. Mother never glanced at her—she seemed turned to stone. Lel said that he had asked her to be his wife, and she had consented. He has been offered a place in a Front Street firm, as book-keeper. He

wanted to come straight and tell mother. 'It was my fault he didn't,' she said; 'because I was afraid'—her voice trembled for the first time—'I knew, mother, you would never consent or forgive; but my Rob is more to me than all the world. We have been married several months. Robert said it was wrong to conceal it. O, forgive us, mother, forgive us.' She broke down, and fell at her feet.

"Mother said slowly and coldly: 'When a daughter disgraces our family name, she is no daughter of mine. Henceforth, you and yours will be dead to us. I forbid you to hold any communication with the family. May I inquire your name?' she turned to Lel, and asked calmly.

"'Mrs. Arthur,' Lel replied timidly.

"'We have no acquaintance of that name.' Mother turned coldly away. Dare, it was terrible! Lel started to kiss us, but mother motioned her back, and she crept out of the room.

"She said 'her husband wished to come with her, but she would not subject him to insult.' We girls were so afraid, we could not speak. Mother went to her room. Dare, what will we do?"

"Do?" Dare answered hotly. "I am ashamed of you, girls, to sit by and see the little one driven from home without a word to comfort her misery. Poor child! was there not one in all the family to stand up for her?"

“What could we do?” said Deb, flushing under the imputation; “Jack was not here, and you know how firm mother is.”

“Yes, I know,” said Dare; “but”—with a determined shake of her head—“I shall hunt Lel up in the morning. She’s a brick! I respect her, although I don’t approve of secret matches. I like things above-board. Poor little thing! all the time she was bearing her trouble bravely alone, while we were laughing and playing. I thought she only needed a touch of Monterey air to cure her mopishness. How little we know of each other, although we have lived together all of our lives! I like that young fellow’s face. Dry your tears, girls: she isn’t dead and buried.”

“You know mother will never forget or forgive,” Deb said. “We must obey her. She will never get over his being a car conductor, even if he had been born a prince. What will the Daltons, Pomfrets, and Barnetts say?”

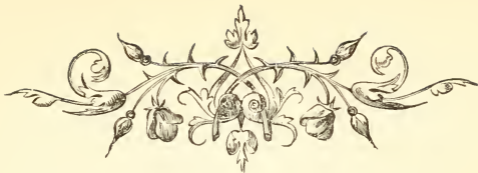
“Lots of nonsense, I warrant,” Dare replied angrily. “They better not let me hear them! I scorn deception, girls; but it is necessary now. I am going to see Lel, and keep it from Mater at present.”

The girls separated more cheerful for the night. The expected visitors did not appear, having heard

rumors of their trouble down town. Jack shunned home, "to avoid the row," he remarked.

Mrs. Brent hardened her heart, as Pharaoh did of old. Her thoughts were bitter through the long night hours. She had builded in vain; her teachings had been useless. Pride smothered the mother feeling, for Lel had wounded the tenderest part. Charity is easy to practice when it interferes with no personal interest. It is then a simple act; but when one suffers and overcomes the heart by will and prayer, then it is God-like in its fulfillment.





CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE IN A FLAT.

MRS. BRENT appeared at breakfast the next morning, grim and silent as the Ancient Mariner. After the uncomfortable meal was ended, she said:

“Deborah, I desire the preparations for your wedding to continue. You have only two weeks’ time left. I wish Claire to assist me with the invitation list this morning.

Lel was to have done that, and the girls felt a choking sensation in their throats. She continued: “We shall spend next month in Monterey. Every one is going there this year.”

“Jack,” Dare said, as they left the room, “I want to speak to you.”

“Heave away, sis.”

She handed him the ten dollars. “You can pay that on the mare, though it’s only a drop in the sea. It is mine, fairly earned.”

He hesitated, and then took it. "Never mind," he said, in confusion, "I will accept this as a loan. The fact is, stocks are still down; but I'm going to enter Bayard for the fall races, and she will redeem herself."

Dare looked earnestly into his eyes. "Don't get into debt, Jack."

"Bother, don't preach!" he replied, fretfully.

"It's all Dartmore's work," Dare muttered, as he left her.

Deb was tearfully stitching on wedding garments when Dare entered. Claire was waiting in the library, looking as if she anticipated the guillotine.

Deb whispered: "Isn't it awful? Mother says we must have the fashionable wedding."

"Yes; but confess, Deb, you would be miserable if the dear five hundred could not comment upon that white satin. 'The ruling passion is strong in death.'"

"You will have to be a bridesmaid, since Lel is gone," Deb said very low.

"All right; I am going to be generally agreeable, so dry your tears, Deb. Richard won't fancy wedding 'a maiden all forlorn.' Tell Mater I'm off to the stable."

Dare had patted Bayard as usual, given her the last lump of sugar, when Mr. Dartmore entered.

“Miss Dare,” he said, “I have been wanting to see you, but was afraid my presence would be an intrusion at present. I know your predilection for art, so brought home a few sketches from Shasta. I want you to accept them.”

“Unfortunately, I must be gracious,” Dare thought; and said: “I am much obliged. Next to the sight of places, your friends’ impressions are most enjoyable. You artists always idealize Nature in a way of your own. Just as a person translating a book generally tinges the work with a bit of his personal style.”

“You must not think of style in connection with my efforts, for they are merely short-hand notes. I intended to finish some of them, but it is like revising manuscript—with smoothness, you so often lose force. But I am very busy now, and must be brief in paying my respects.” He smiled.

“Remember the famous brains that have been addled with too much work.” Dare replied, with sarcasm.

He flushed quickly. “Mine have been taking a rest, like the dormouse, for many winters. I am tired of an aimless existence. I am overcoming the slothful creed of fatalism; though after thirty-five years of adherence, it is very much like the trite simile of tearing the ivy from the oak. Cyni-

cism, born of dyspepsia, as in most cases it is, breeds torpidity. It is unhealthy. A man who broods over disappointments, and is crushed by failures, is only a soft-brained, soft-willed dolt, after all. My stay among the mountains has opened my eyes, swept away many cobwebs of skepticism and folly. Like Martin Luther, I am anxious to proclaim my conversion. I suppose I bore you. But do me the credit to absolve me from the imputation of being a worshiper of the great Ego. I should like to straighten myself in your eyes; for a true, healthy nature like yours cannot abide cynics, I know."

Dare listened impatiently, for she was anxious to be off. "We will be pleased to see you some evening, and hold a Quaker meeting, thereby profiting by your experiences, Mr. Dartmore. I am in a hurry this morning."

"The fault of the American nation." He shook his head. "We wear ourselves out with wasted energy. I shall be happy to accept your invitation soon. To-night some congenial spirits of Bohemia gather in my room, to hold a revel."

"Spirituous — confined!" Dare said. "How unkind of you to excite that dormant evil—a woman's curiosity. The name of Bohemia is like the mention of Sesame to me. I long to pronounce

the magic word, and enter caverns stored with brilliants of wit, and rare webs of genius seen in tempting nearness."

"Bohemia for men with no ties is a pleasant dwelling-place. Ideally, it is the perfection of happiness. A land wherein votaries of art, music, literature, gather and exchange thoughts and pleasure, live an unconventional life of equality. In reality, in our city, the beer-barrel, smoke, and minstrel songs not unfrequently combine to form the sum total of its vaunted enjoyment. Unbridled license is too often taken for freedom from conventionality. The revel may terminate in the debauch. It has its dark as well as its bright side. I know a few ladies who affect Bohemian traits: smoke charmingly, roll cigarettes deftly, and rattle off slang with the ease of a Paris gamin; but the picture is not pleasant."

"Good by," she said abruptly.

Dartmore looked after her a moment as she walked along, the incarnation of health and spirits, the morning breeze having brought a rich color to her cheeks.

"She is almost beautiful," he thought; "like a tigress, she must be approached gently. It will take a severe blow to tame her."

Dartmore had a reason for his new interest in

life; whether it was the mountain air or a pair of gray eyes, was a question. He commenced to work hard at his easel all day, and wrote up his reports at night. His past years were more terrible to him than the Eumenides. He was a man not content with doing things by halves. Trouble changed him from a reckless, good-hearted boy to a morbid, bitter man. He traveled, plunged into dissipation, to stifle memories; but like Nessus's shirt, they clung to him. The poison penetrated deeper and deeper. Then he sunk into a lethargy. His family disowned him. He came to California, and merely existed. He lived to forget, counting each day at its close as a portion of life less to live. He met Jack Brent, and was attracted by his frank nature; then met Dare, and concluded that "life was not all fate, but as men chose to make it," and resolved to live down the past. His mind was busy with these ideas as he went to his room, took up a piece of crayon, and tried to sketch Dare's head.

In the mean while, she was wondering if he was in earnest, or an arrant hypocrite. She carefully picked her way down Front Street between rows of boxes, bags, and barrels. Finally, she looked up at a sign, and resolved to enter.

"Is Mr. Robert Arthur employed here?" she asked.

The man replied in the affirmative, and showed her into the private office. "A lady to see you, Arthur."

She looked up, and saw the well-remembered conductor, only his eyes had lost their dreaminess, as if he had found his treasure. His face was open and honest, full of manly determination, but his clothes were old and worn. They looked as if they had been through the wars, too.

"What do you wish?" he asked, as he noticed the tall young lady examining him critically.

"You are Lel's husband?" she said, half-questioning; "I like your looks, and consent to bestow my blessing."

"Thank you, I will return the compliment as to the liking. You are the dark one. I had a great admiration for you until I knew dear Lel." His voice softened, and lingered lovingly over the name.

"You are frank, at all events. I hope you will carry out your primary intention. I see now why Lel was always warbling 'Robert, t'oi que j'ainre,' until I wished Robert slumbered at the bottom of the sea. I've had lots of trouble finding you out. Now I want to know where you have carried Lel off to—in what tower you have confined the lovely Zorahayda?"

“In a flat in the Western Addition,” he answered eagerly. “Lel longs to see you so much.”

“Yes; but remember, mum’s the word. I am breaking a command of Mater’s.”

He gave her the number, and she started out on her quest. She stopped before a long row of buildings, and rang the bell. The landlady conducted her to the third floor, in answer to her inquiries for Mrs. Arthur. Dare knocked. A tearful voice bade her enter. Lel was bending over a sock, trying to darn it, but tears obscured her vision. The needle was damp, and its aim uncertain.

“Dare!” she cried, starting up, while basket and socks rolled to the floor; “Dare!” She laid her head down in her sister’s lap and sobbed.

“Don’t, dear,” Dare said, “my new cashmere is not proof against a deluge. Wine color stains.” She spoke lightly, but there was a suspicion of moisture about her eyes. “There, dear,” she said soothingly, “commence at the beginning, and tell me all about it. I have heard of meetings by moonlight, starlight; but by broad daylight, in a street-car—the most prosaic of vehicles—never.”

Lel smiled anxiously. “You don’t mind about the car, do you? He is as much a gentleman as Richard Barton,” she added proudly. “You see, Dare, I couldn’t help it,” she began. “I loved

Robert when I first saw him—I think it was his eyes first. Please don't laugh." She hid her blushing face. "Let me sit on a stool at you feet, then I can tell you better." Lel nestled there, with her pretty yellow hair falling about her shoulders, looking more child than woman. "I couldn't bear to speak of him, because I knew Deb and Claire would turn up their noses."

"But mine was already turned up."

"Well, you always made fun of things, and I couldn't bear that. I don't know how it was, but I couldn't be happy without Rob. I used to come home last winter, and think of him out in the cold and rain, standing up until midnight, and I could not sleep. It seemed so awful when I was wrapped up warm and comfortable. The feeling grew upon me. We had often spoken; and one day he told me he was going to South America. He was always quiet and respectful, Dare. There was not a soul in the car. When he told me that, I put my hand to my heart. I thought it would break. I didn't know anything for a moment. All at once he told me he loved me. My heart was whole again. I cannot tell you how happy I felt. So it went on day by day. I know you are laughing, Dare; you think it is silly, because you know nothing about love. Rob didn't like the

secrecy, but I insisted upon it. One rainy day he had a leave of absence, and we went to a little church and were married. It was a doleful wedding. I was frightened, but we were so happy. It was no use to tell mother. I knew she would storm, and that I would cling to Rob. Then he couldn't leave the cars, and I didn't have courage to tell; until at last Rob said he would—and you know the rest. He has a better position now. I couldn't bear the cars, although, if he had been obliged to stay there, I would never have said a word. He had already fixed these rooms for me to come to. Imagine the Barnetts calling here!" She looked up with a gleam of fun in her innocent eyes.

"Imagine the Barnetts and such people finding such happiness!" Dare answered, turning her head away, for a dangerous lump was rising in her throat.

"Rob calls it our bird's-nest—we are so happy," little Lel said, feelingly.

"Here is my kitchen." She opened the door of a tiny room. "You never thought I would take to cooking, did you? Rob doesn't care if things are not so nice," she said simply. "We eat bread and cake from the baker's. Rob makes the fire and cooks the meat. O, Dare! you ought to see

him wiping dishes!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "I save them all for evening, when he comes home. He ties a towel around his waist for an apron, and then—I am afraid he does most of the work, because he looks so handsome I have to stop to kiss him," she admitted, with a blush. "See these roses he brought me. I couldn't live without flowers. They only cost a trifle, he says. Dare, we are dreadfully poor—poor as Mrs. Brown, to whom mother gives milk and old clothes. Wouldn't it be funny if I should put on a sun-bonnet some day, go around to the back door, and beg for the girls' old things?" She laughed merrily at the idea. "Sister Dare, I hope some day you will find happiness as great as mine."

Dare's voice was growing husky, and she could not trust herself to answer. It was so strange to see little Lel flitting about in these tiny, poor rooms, happy as a butterfly in summer-time, looking so childlike, innocent, and ignorant of the cares and troubles of life, chatting about the future as if it was to be an earthly Elysium, leaning on Rob and his love. It was a beautiful sight to Dare. She no longer pitied, but envied, her.

"We don't need much room; and we won't have reception evenings," she talked on, resuming her homely work with a prettily assumed matronly air.

“I suppose the *élite* will snub us—and Rob only has one coat. Poor Rob! I wish he did have better clothes. That troubles me; but he says, ‘We must fit ourselves for the station to which it has pleased God to call us.’ He is so good. I never could be half so good. He says that he supposes it is the trials he has gone through that makes him trust in God. I know it was born in him. Most of the young men we know scoff at religion, and talk science. It isn’t fashionable or progressive to believe in things. You fell so safe when you do find a real Christian. I only wish now mother would forgive us; but I, too, have a share of the Brent pride.” She brushed a tear quickly away. “You must stay to supper, Dare. Take off your things. It is Saturday—Rob will be home at four—so Mater will not know.”

“I will, just this once, for I want to meet my new brother. I hate deceit, but I hope to reconcile Mater; and will agree, with the Jesuits—‘The end justifies the means.’”

“We have a character in the house who will just suit you,” Lel said—“an old artist with a wooden leg. He is as dogmatic and bitter as Diogenes. He calls his room ‘the tub.’ Rob introduced me to him this morning. He said abruptly: ‘You will do. I want your face for

a Ruth.' He grumbled, made fun of our house-keeping, called me a baby, and prophesied all manner of misfortunes. We don't mind him. He came down soon with a picture for me—my only one on the wall. Isn't the face sweet? It is a study of a flower-girl, that he made in Rome."

Dare pronounced it "lovely." "I shall have to make up to him," she laughed.

"He don't like people," Lel answered. "He hasn't any friends but Rob, and Jack's friend Mr. Dartmore."

"I will take his Majesty unawares, as the mouse did the lion."

"Dare," Lel said suddenly, her expression becoming graver, "it is a great trial being separated from all of you; but I am so afraid Rob will be sorry some day that I am his wife. I am afraid he will think me a second Dora. I don't know anything; but I try so hard. I burn my hands and break things," she sighed pitifully. "Rob only laughs; but I am afraid I may be a drag to him. May be by and by he will think so too." She leaned both arms on Dare's lap, and looked into her face with an expression of innocent pain. Her voice faltered a little. "You know I am not strong—my cough troubles me still; but Rob doesn't know. I think"—her eyes gazed wistfully,

as if she would penetrate the mysteries of the great unknown future—"I think if anything should happen to me, there might be an Agnes. Then Rob would see how imperfect I was. O, Dare! if there should be an Agnes! My heart would break, even in heaven, if Rob should find how weak and silly Lel was. If I try very hard," she asked, "don't you think anybody can learn, if she is not so *very* stupid?"

"You foolish child," Dare answered tenderly. "You and I have almost gotten up a fit of blues on possibilities."

A cheerful whistle sounded in the hall.

Lel's face brightened; she smoothed her hair, and flew to the door. "How delightful!" she exclaimed, as she welcomed Rob home. "What a lot of bundles! Here's Dare—my sister Dare."

"We have met before." His eyes twinkled. "How do you do, sister Dare?"

Dare mentally repeated her former opinions—"A man who whistles must be good," she decided.

Rob and Lel busied themselves untying bundles. "Oysters!" Lel ejaculated. Her countenance fell. "I don't know how to cook them."

"I confess to that art," Dare spoke up. "I insist on being installed chief cook to-day, to allow you young things a chance for honeymooning."

She entered the small kitchen, and said warningly: "Bivalves are not a healthy diet for poverty, Mr. Rob. I'm in all the family secrets, so look out for lectures from an old-maid sister-in-law."

"I confess," he answered, with due meekness, "they are a little off the regulation *menu*; but poverty must have a little relaxation, even if it suffers from the indigestion of improvidence."

They sat down—a merry party—to oysters, crackers, and tea.

"This is jolly," Dare remarked, with satisfaction. "I shall instantly search every street-car, and prepare to follow Lel's bright example. Love in a flat is a most delightful reality."

"Sweetheart"—Rob stroked his wife's shining hair—"I hope you will never regret your sacrifice for your rusty knight."

She looked into his face trustingly, and slipped her hand into his. "Never, my husband," she whispered. "If all the world were offered me, I would never give you up."

"Little Lel's lines have not fallen in pleasant places, sister Dare," Rob spoke; "but tell them, with God's help, I shall keep my darling from harm, and try to make her life happy: happy in a way society and riches know not of—a way love alone knows."

Dare left them standing in the sunlight, which shone strong upon Rob's noble face and Lel's loving eyes. His arm was thrown protectingly around her slight figure, and her head rested on his shabby coat, over a heart which beat strong with love and honor.

She turned back again to look at them. Rob solemnly said, as he stooped to kiss his wife, "May God bless us all, sister Dare."

Dare uttered a feeling "Amen!"

"Girls," she said impetuously, when she entered the house, "we are poor, destitute, compared to Lel. She is rich in a great, loving heart and soul to protect and care for her. Love fills every corner of their home and hearts, as does the golden sunshine."





CHAPTER IX.

DEB'S RUBICON.

THE weeks fled quickly by in bustle and preparation. They were so busy that Dare had not found another opportunity of peeping into "the nest." Deb was to be launched with due pomp and glory. They were to undergo a crucifical attempt at jollity in a fashionable way. Deborah stood on the bank of her Rubicon. The land which lay beyond was a mystic kingdom; and whether it would prove a verdured plain, flower-cinctured, or a barren slope, was a problem of dim speculation.

Marriage is the crisis of woman's existence. Like Cæsar, she plunges in boldly—"Jacta alea est." The step either develops her latent powers, perfects and rounds her character, or weakens and crushes it. (A good deal is due to Mr. Benedict.) She must cross the flowing river, trusting the future to faith and her God. The old people tell us "life

is much what we make it." They might as well add marriage also.

Lel had crossed her Rubicon when storm-clouds lowered, and waters ran swift and deep. Deb was loitering on the brink, mid song and dance. The clouds had parted for Lel. The land beyond shone fairer, for the past. Deb's future lay hidden by mists.

Deborah was being arrayed for the ordeal, and most elaborate was the preparation therefor.

"The Bartons have sent you a set of solid silver—very appropriate," Mrs. Brent said, entering the room. "The wreath a little more on one side," she admonished the hair-dresser.

"Do you think I will do?" Deb appealed to Dare.

"You always do," she answered. "It seems to me, though, you are thinking more of your clothes than Sir Richard."

"Men are a bother," she laughed. "I will think of him afterwards."

"Unfortunately, men are very important adjuncts to a wedding. I thought maidens on their bridal eve were absorbed in thoughts of the adored one."

"Nonsense, Dare, that is old-fashioned. Thank goodness, Richard is too sensible to be sentimental."

Dare's thoughts traveled to a dear couple to whom life was all sentiment, and who were old-fashioned enough to show it.

"I miss Lel to-night so much," she said, in a low voice.

"Of course when I am married I shall go to see her, and take her out in my carriage. Mother can't object. Really, I don't think we could recognize her husband. Poor Lel!"

Aunt Judy was standing "around," admiring the bride. "Lor', Miss Deb," she said, "you looks good enough to eat. But 'pears mighty like a funeral in de house—two of you is gone." Aunt Judy waddled to the door in response to a knock. "Heah's a package for you, from Mars' Barton," she chuckled.

The girls peeped over Deb's shoulder while she opened it. A series of prolonged "oh's" rent the air. On a bed of blue satin nestled a necklace formed of linked pearls, the very shimmer of whose creamy globules suggested the bride. They were a dream of the Orient.

"The parlors are crowded," exclaimed Claire, who had been engaged in the truly feminine occupation of peeping over the banisters. "I see Lily Barnett in Nile-green satin."

"Deborah, we are ready," Mrs. Brent called.

“Dare, do not step on Deborah’s train. Walk a foot or two behind.”

The delicious strains of Mendelssohn’s wedding march floated on the air—the music to which so many souls have been transported to Heaven or Purgatorio.

Richard, in immaculate attire, met them at the door; and the brilliant procession slowly and solemnly wended its way to the expectant parlor, where the bishop with two assistants performed the fashionable ceremony. There was the usual amount of congratulations, feminine tears, and kisses. The wedding was a pronounced success, from a fashionable standpoint, and even Mrs. Brent was satisfied.

The dear “five hundred” flocked to see the bride; the cost and cut of the dress were duly canvassed; the presents were inspected; but above and beyond all, speculation was rife as to how proud Margaret Brent bore her daughter Lel’s “disgrace,” as those dear friends pleasantly called it. But Mrs. Brent’s face showed only placid dignity. The mask was well worn. Dare, weary of the continual handshaking, slipped off into a corner, and stood gazing absent-mindedly at the chattering crowd. She was thinking of Lel, and her eyes filled with tears as she contrasted this brilliant

assemblage, the lights, music, and splendor of her surroundings, with the comfortless lodgings of the loved and absent little one.

Dartmore was standing in an opposite corner, thinking of Dare. He caught a glimpse through a rift in the crowd of her saddened face, and made his way to her.

“Are you pondering over the reminiscence of Young Jones’s quotations in favor of the fair god Hymen, Miss Dare?” he asked; “and doubting even the Shaksperian praises? Your countenance looks doleful, and that half-smothered sigh is as deep as that which escaped the lips of Boabdil when he looked his last on beauteous Grenada. I suppose Miss Brent—or rather Mrs. Barton—is the priceless treasure you mourn.”

“How well you interpret thoughts, Mr. Dartmore. Really, you would have out-Josephed Joseph in old Pharaoh’s reign. But this time, as Jack says, you haven’t hit the right nail on the head. We excuse our slang by quoting from Jack.”

“I think I can claim the right to a better divination. I have seen Mrs. Lel to-day. I was visiting an old friend in the same building, saw her door ajar, heard her singing, and could not withstand the temptation to enter. I never thought the human face could be so transfigured by love.

She bade me tell you to save her a big piece of wedding cake, because 'Rob loved fruit-cake. Mrs. Lel completed the conversion commenced by the mountain air. When I left, I felt like pitching in and furbishing up my quarters a bit, and immediately starting in search of a mate. Arthur was fortunate in having his dove flutter to him. Barton is following his worthy example, but in more orthodox form—as witness these trappings.”

“Only,” Dare interrupted, “their nest will be gilded, and the more gilding the less love, is usually the case. Mr. Barton’s father being pleased with the match has builded them a house, and furnished the wherewithal to keep it going. Richard Barton is too practical, and too much absorbed in science to indulge in love dreams. Deb will have fashion and splendor, so her heart will be gratified. I admit they deserve it all, but it does seem hard that Lel should not have a few crumbs.”

“Little Lel is content, and that is the ‘happy valley,’ after all,” he smiled. “No man could be richer than Robert Arthur with such a wife and home.”

Dartmore’s eyes expressed a dangerous tenderness, and Dare said, hurrying away, “I see Mater coming. I know it is to remind me of my duty as hostess. Jack has a fit of sulks, and I am assigned double duty.”

Poor Jack! he had sufficient cause for ill-humor. His affairs were daily becoming more entangled, stocks were fluctuating, and Sterns, vulture-like, was hovering on his track with threats of taking the horse, or disclosure. Jack loved the mare next to his family, and it would almost kill him to give her up. He was letting things take their course until the fall races, when he trusted Bayard would free him. True to the gambler's spirit, he staked all on the last throw.

Dare devoted the remainder of the evening to Young Jones.

“‘Wedding is great Juno's crown,’” he quoted again to her. “A crown is the highest aim of mortals, therefore we should follow Miss Brent's fair example,” he added meaningly.

“You forget the accompanying cross, Mr. Jones; I suppose the husband represents that in the combination.”

“Well, ‘he is well paid that is well satisfied.’ Some prefer the crown even with the cross. ‘So doth the greater glory dim the less.’”

“Of reasons you are plenty as blackberries, craving pardon of the immortal bard for the transposition. Remember Richard II.—‘Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.’”

“‘Ill luck weighs upon my shoulders’; I cannot

convince you. I will surrender. Some day I hope it will be in my power to change your ideas."

"O, dear," Dare thought, "the crowd seem launched into sentiment, and the adverse waves are setting towards me."

By midnight, adieux were said, and the guests departed.

"I like Lel's way the best," Dare declared to Claire. "Please wait until the Rev. Mr. Varndall is ordained a bishop before we go through this again."

The next morning the bridal couple set forth on a tour to the seaside, July breezes being favorable.

Aunt Judy appeared at the last moment, with her arms full of shoes, big and little, old and new, which she rapidly cast after the departing carriage. "It gibbs 'em good luck," she explained.

"Is it emblamatic of the future unpleasantness in married life?" Dare innocently demanded. "My new bronze slippers!" she cried, as she saw them deposited on the doorsteps.

"Can't help it, Mis' Dare; de more shoes de less trouble. I was at a weddin' onct in ole Virginy; Massa wouldn't let 'em frow de shoes: dat kerrige broke down, and de bride broke her arm." The old darkey smiled in a superior manner, as if she had amply proved her argument.

"The shoes fly after, but trouble generally does too, Aunt Judy," Dare answered.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Barton seated themselves in the luxurious parlor car which runs to Monterey, determined to look and act unbridal-like.

Before the train started Mrs. Barton delved into her satchel for a novel, while Mr. Richard devoured the last reports of the Academy of Science.

"Do we look very newly married?" Deb whispered. "People stare so—and I haven't worn gray."

"No," Richard responded absently, for he was becoming interested in the paper.

"Put down that horrid paper. Don't you think my bonnet is stylish?"

"I suppose so," he answered; "you know I am not a judge of millinery. Let me finish. I am just in the midst of an interesting experiment."

"Just like a man, thinking of nothing but business," Deb pouted.

"It was at your particular request I bought the paper." She did not reply, for she felt in a petulant mood, and reveled in small quarrels, much to Mr. Barton's annoyance.

He did not pay much attention to her whims, so she amused herself by examining her fellow-travelers' costumes, while Richard read and nodded in silence.

They steamed past Gilroy, through the dusty Salinas plains, until near evening a cooling breeze, redolent with salty freshness, foretold they were near the sea.

They stopped on the edge of town at the famous Del Monte, a combination of grace and solidity that one might imagine a palace instead of a prosy hotel. Its only drawback being high sand dunes piled in the rear, which exclude a view of the bay.

"The walk through the sand is good for the constitution," Richard remarked.

"But not for one's trousseau," Deb interposed.

Nevertheless, they spent a great deal of time wandering over the beach, and examining the quaint adobe houses in town. Deb was perfectly happy. Her costumes were faultless, everything matched, and the pretty bride was the observed of all eyes.

Mr. Barton spent his time in admiring her, or endeavoring to instill practical lessons of natural history in her mind as she poked quivering masses of jelly-fish or purple sea-hares with her dainty parasol, and investigated the feeding powers of open-mouthed anemones.

"Dare would like it, but I don't," she added frankly, picking her way among hillocks of kelp and algæ; "I like croquet at the hotel better."

They returned to the oak grove in time to see the evening stage arrive, and Deb descried the Barnetts among the passengers. Miss Lily kissed her enthusiastically. "How lovely you look!" she appealed to mamma, who was following with the wraps. "I see that lovely Mr. Thornton playing croquet. We are so fortunate!" she exclaimed.

Deborah politely invited the Barnetts to go with them for a stroll on the beach after dinner; also extended the invitation to Mr. Thornton, who looked very admiringly at the pretty bride. Richard bit his mustache, looked provoked, but said nothing.

"Since Miss Brent is married, she can chaperon me. Go and lie down, mamma."

"Yes, my dear," that worthy meekly replied.

"Isn't my sailor suit sweet?" She turned to Deb.

"Lovely," Deb sighed, for it outshone hers.

They reached the beach with the gentlemen's assistance.

"O, my! look at those dreadful things." Miss Lily drew up her skirts with an affected shriek as a crab scuttled past. "How can you stand such horrible animals? The sight of them would ruin my nerves."

"Dare will enjoy this," Mr. Barton said. "She is not afraid of anything."

"It is so masculine to be bold!" Miss Lily exclaimed, with simulated horror.

“Dare is only brave,” Deb answered quickly.

“I should like to meet this wonderful Miss Dare,” Mr. Thornton said. “If she resembles Mrs. Barton”—he bowed—“all of our masculine hearts will succumb.” Then changing the subject suddenly, as he noticed an expression of impatience gather on Mr. Barton’s face: “All of the fashionable world is to arrive next week.”

“We will search for a lodge in the wilderness, then, madam,” Mr. Barton said.

“Mother has rented a cottage at the camp-ground, and we can join them,” Deb replied, heaving a little sigh at the thought of toilets wasted and hops foregone.

Miss Lily bestowed her most effective glances on Mr. Thornton.

“I am tired waiting for a sunset; it is a gray failure,” Mr. Barton said suddenly. So they silently wended their way back to the house, leaving the broad waste of gray old ocean, with its background of brown, pine-fringed hills, for the sea birds to appreciate.

At home, the excitement of matrimony was dying out, and the household wheels revolved again in the beaten track.

Jones was developing dangerous signs of spoonyism, quoted exclusively from *Romeo and Juliet*,

and informed Dare, confidentially, "there was no world for him without Verona's walls," and looked things unutterable.

Dare hunted for Aunt Judy, while the family were indulging in resting naps, and demanded half a fruit-cake.

"Law, honey, ef you eat dat, you'll be sick," the old woman expostulated.

"Never mind. Cats or rats—remember, Aunt Judy. It's for Lel."

Aunt Judy heaved so deep a sigh that the kitchen tins rattled in sympathy. "Take it, chile."

Dare carefully stowed it under a shawl, and proceeded to visit Lel. An ominous silence brooded over the place when she entered. She called, looked into the bedroom. Still no answer. She opened the kitchen door, and found Lel sitting on the floor, literally in a deluge of tears, her cambric apron emulating a chimney-sweep's, a black streak adorning one side of her face, and resting like a shadow across her yellow hair; a pan of biscuit, done to cinders, reposed near her.

"Dare," she cried, with a gasp of relief, "where did you drop from? I have been wishing for Aladdin's lamp, to summon you."

"Here I am, a slave of the ring, an amiable genie to-day, little one. What is the matter? Has

the noble Rob rebelled against his diet of bread from the baker's? I know sometimes men's stomachs get the best of their hearts."

Lel wiped her eyes. "No, Rob never complains, but he talks about biscuit, and he is going to bring Mr. Dartmore home to dinner. Rob has taken a prodigious fancy to him. I am getting quite jealous. I thought I would have something nice. Now look there!" She pointed in dismay to the crisp mass.

Dare laughed heartlessly. "You are transferring more black to your face, madam. Go and primp; I will try to remedy the evil. She rolled up her sleeves, and went vigorously to work, throwing the burnt biscuits in the fire, and commencing a new batch. Lel soon emerged, more cheerful, and almost smothered her with caresses, when she saw the new bread ready for the oven. Dare produced the fruit-cake. "Some of Deb's wedding cake," she explained. "Men never notice anything, so I suppose the fastidious Dartmore will not recognize it."

"I shall present him with a piece to dream on. I hope"—she glanced mischievously at Dare—"I hope his dreams may be as I wish them, very happy ones."

"Actually a toast." Dare flourished the biscuit cutter. "Here's to Dartmore's dreams!"

“What is his first name?” Lel asked.

“Hugh,” Dare replied. “It has a bearish sound.”

“It isn’t quite as pretty as Robert.” Lel blushed, half apologetically. “Dare Dartmore,” she continued absently.

“What are you thinking of?” Dare demanded, opening the oven. “They are a lovely brown. It is too alliterative. Dare Brent is better for a constancy. The dignity of my whole prefix, Adair, couldn’t stand the latter.”

“What are you going to do for dishes?” she asked, in a practical way. “You and Rob can’t use the same cup; and if you refuse, Mr. Dartmore will think your supply of coffee is limited.”

“Rob bought me a cute little Japanese cup. Between meals, it serves as a ceramic ornament in the parlor.”

“I wish I could supply you with a whole set. I will finish Ugolino, Jack willing, and give it to you,” she said impulsively. “I never have any bric-a-brac. Little things around bother me; I’m always smashing them. The only thing in æstheticism I should take to, would be the *earliest* English—baronial halls, with simply rushes as an adornment. I would prefer to antedate the Queen Anne lumber. Your supper is done to a turn,” she said,

peeping into saucepans, and taking the tempting-looking biscuits from the oven. "Run get my things, quick: I hear masculine footsteps. Don't tell who was cook. We are going to Monterey tomorrow. Good by, Lel. Write to me if things go wrong."

"I have Rob—you forget," Lel answered quietly.

Dare kissed her again, and ran down-stairs hastily, brushing against the gentlemen, who failed to recognize her, veiled as she was, and reached home almost breathless from her haste.





CHAPTER X

A SUMMER'S RAMBLE, WITH EPISODES.

IN the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,' etc. The Brents, with the birds, harbor a migratory feeling in their breasts," Dare affirmed.

"I am sorry to spoil your eloquent flight, but it is July and summer, so don't continue."

"I accept the amendment, Claire. The seasons are so alike here, I forget their changes of name. Anyhow, I have a nomadic feeling all the year round."

"Adios, Mr. Varndall. We are really off for Monterey."

Mr. Jones, with a triumph of florist's art, and an appropriate quotation, bade them adieu. Mr. Varndall, loth to part with his faithful assistant, also accompanied them to the depot.

"I see Deb!" Claire exclaimed, as they neared their destination, at the close of the afternoon.

"Halloo! Sir Richard hasn't blown you up yet," Dare ejaculated.

After much greeting and questioning, they scrambled, *en famille*, into an omnibus, and started for "the Grove."

Monterey bay sparkled and glistened in the sunlight, like a myriad of jewels; the waves broke against the cliffs in low, subdued splashes; the town seemed wrapped in drowsy content, and back of it the long range of Carmel Mountains, scantily covered with pines, stretched and faded into purple vagueness.

Dare feasted her eyes on the sea silently.

"This is where the Pilgrim Fathers landed," Claire exclaimed, as they passed a wayside cross planted at the head of a ravine.

Jack set up a howl. "Where is your evangelical history, Claire? Padre Junipero Serra would not like the mixture with our Puritan sires."

"It was only a slip," Claire explained, feeling inwardly mortified, for she knew Jack was a tease, and that cross would prove a reality to her.

"You people must get along without me for a while," Jack remarked. "The driver says the creeks are prime this year, though small trout will seem tame after Shasta. The McCloud fishing spoils a fellow for smaller streams."

They traveled slowly along the white road bordered with redwoods, festooned with bearded moss, and scarlet vines of poison oak, looking venomous as a serpent, stretching its wayward, lithe branches over their pathway. They reached the grove of pines by the sea, and the murmur of the waters, blended with the sighing of the trees, formed a sweet, sad melody.

The cottage prepared for them was carpetless and plasterless, a shell of redwood—a primeval idyl; and a few feet below the cliffs lay the sea, bathed in a glory of azure, flowing far out in a boundless waste. The shadows of the pines lengthened; mists arose like magic, stealing over the bosom of the waters, transforming the blue of the waves to gray, blending the tops of the trees with the sky, until all earth was enveloped in the same soft coloring.

“It is such a pleasure to breathe pure air,” Dare said, when they walked to the top of the cliff. “Such a relief to stretch out your hands and not feel people and houses. Cities cramp bodies and minds alike, the space allotted you is so narrow.”

Mrs. Brent, Deb, and Claire exchanged confidences over a wood fire; but Dare could not stay in doors, and had coaxed Jack out for a walk.

They passed by rocky cliffs of brown and gray, brightened with touches of orange lichens. Violet asters clustered in every sheltered cranny, scarlet Indian plumes waved jauntily in the breeze, and strange creeping things with golden blooms endeavored to carpet the rock. The wind blew fresh and strong in their faces. Dare took off her hat. "I want to feel it all," she said. "No wonder the Norse heroes were such mighty men, born and bred by the sea.

"You are a perfect sight," Jack laughed; "your hair is like a brush heap in a summer gale."

"I don't care; we have come for feelings, not looks, this time. Look at the waves, how they beat against Mussel Point!"

A wind had risen. First came a swell, then a mighty upheaval. Monster gray waves, white-crested, broke in fury against the waiting rocks, and fell, shivered in blinding spray; but undaunted, renewed their savage warfare.

"The ocean seems to me," Dare said solemnly, "like a great, pulsating, feeling heart, longing to pour out its waves of love on the poor frame of suffering earth. But I know it is the heart of Eblis. Its love is death; its throbs mean only the grave to weary sailors."

"It is grand!" Jack admitted; "but we can't live

on chameleon diet, or shell-fish either. I am afraid you won't half like it: Jones and Dartmore are coming down for a week's fishing on the Big Sur. We won't spoil your enthusiasm much."

Plans were discussed the next day, as to what object of interest should be taken in first. Finally, Carmel Mission was decided upon, including a short stay at Point Lobos.

"Monterey is California's boss specimen of bric-a-brac. We must take it all in," Dare announced.

Everybody rushed for front seats in the open vehicle. Human beings generally object to crab-like procedure; so human generosity usually urges one to accede the uncoveted place to his neighbor. They bumped over ruts and stones, across the Carmel hills, leaving the bay, with its horse-shoe curve, like a faint blue mist in the distance; past fields of sweet yellow and purple lupins, and wild oats, amidst which venturesome mariposas had wandered from their mountain homes, and paled under the sea winds.

Seaside as well as plain, sand as well as loam, in our mellow climate, yield rich increase of floral tributes. Spring opens the buds, freshens the earth; summer matures the flower; autumn deepens the tints; winter breathes lightly o'er their petals; and spring-time's children still live.

“Here’s a gate,” Jack shouted, as they approached the ruin. “Our energetic American must reap grain, feed cattle, and collect toll on consecrated ground.” “By Jove!” he muttered to himself, as a young Portuguese girl ran to open the gate for them—“a lost Houri—a creation of Hafiz!”

Dolores was a daughter of the old warden of the church, who dwelt near, and she certainly looked charming as she stood in the sunlight, bare-headed and bare-footed, brown as if blood of Tsiganie’s flowed in her veins. Her eyes were liquid, and dark as hidden tarns in Scottish mountains; her hair was glossy and black. Her feet, half-hidden in the dry grass, were slender and well shapen, as was her lithe, graceful figure.

Dolores was charming, and Dolores knew it. She glanced at the señor with a bewitching smile, as he handed her the entrance fee, for she was a born coquette. Her mother was Spanish. From her, she inherited the graceful presence of the nation, and could wield a fan, even of dead leaves, as dexterously as ever did Castilian dame beneath the orange groves of Seville.

Like Achilles, men have, even if well-armed, some vulnerable part. Jack was not impressionable; but those glances went straight to his heart, as Paris’s arrow to the warrior’s heel.

"I shall camp here," Dare declared. "These morning shadows are lovely." She set up her easel. "Mater, you and the others can drive down to the bay."

Dolores lingered. Jack glanced at her, and said, "It will be lonesome, sis; I'll keep you company."

By this time she was too much engrossed in her sketch to answer. Jack retreated to the background, seating himself on an old adobe wall.

The sun shone warm and bright, softening the crude yellow and red of the crumbling stucco on the church walls. Dare worked rapidly. A lizard crept near, lifted its head, then fled with a rustling sound through the tall grain. Sunshine flooded the dome, and crowned the little swallow that rested on the iron cross with an aureole of light. It poured through the broken tiles of the roof, lingering in checkered light and shade on the graves beneath where the old padres and alcaldes slumber in peace, after their toils, hopes, and dreams.

They lie, only a handful of dust, beneath their loved work, which soon, too, will crumble into dust. Dare's mind kept pace with her fingers. Her thoughts were in the olden times; but Jack was looking into dark eyes, and listening to a musical voice of the present.

"What is your name?" he asked the little maiden.

“Dolores, señor,” she answered, toying with a blade of oats.

“That is rather a doleful name for such a merry-looking maiden.”

“Si, señor ; but it is madre’s. She looks just so doleful, and talks of things so mournful. To me, everything is gay. When one is young and happy, one can’t think of death. My sisters are all in the churchyard yonder.” She pointed towards Monterey. “Four”—she counted them on her brown fingers. “That makes madre sad, and to sit in the corner when padre is away fishing. I come here and sing by myself.”

“Are you never lonely?”

“Si,” she laughed, showing her white teeth. “I tire of the birds and butterflies. They cannot answer when I talk to them. Sometimes”—the color surged in her cheeks—“kind señors, like yourself, talk to Dolores; then she is not lonely.” She looked at him archly through her drooping lashes.

“I shall come soon again, depend on it.”

She laughed. “How shall I call you, señor?”

“Jack.”

“Jacko,” she repeated.

“Don’t, I beg of you. That is too suggestive of the missing link.”

“It is only an English name for our Juan, isn’t it?” she asked. “I shall call you Juan.”

"May I have one kiss," he implored.

The little maiden fled rapidly away, and stood at a distance, laughing at his discomfiture.

"Jack," Dare called, "help me pack up my paraphernalia ; my sketch is a success. What are you mooning about? You look as if you had been to the antipodes."

"I have had a glimpse of Paradise," he answered. "There come the others. I know they are anxious to reach the Point, and lunch."

Point Lobos loomed up before them: masses of rock, heaped one above the other, cemented by the waves. A few wind-blown pines struggled for existence, where the sand had drifted in crevices, and flowers clambered down the cliffs to the water's edge.

Where they dismounted, down below hundreds of feet, lay masses of black, jagged rocks, twisted and molded in fantastic shapes. The sea roared sullenly among them, raging in dangerous-looking maelstroms. Myriads of gulls cleft the air with their wings, and hoarse shrieks re-echoed from cliff to cliff. The spot was awful in its gloom; eërie in its wildness. A fit entrance to Hades.

"Lunch is ready," practical Deb called. They sat down to a feast, plentifully sanded, and philosophically laughed their ills away, until time to return.

The weeks were passed in various sea-side occupations. Jack developed a passion for lonely horse-back rides, San Jose Creek and Carmel River lying in the direction of his wanderings, and forming ample excuses for his frequent absence. The fish they yielded bore strange resemblances to salt-water flounders, judging by his basket, on his return; but fortunately the family were not observant.

Jack visited the Mission by moonlight, starlight, sunlight. I ween he could not tell whether the architecture was Moorish or Gothic; but he knew where the dimple lay in Dolores's cheek. He was entangled in the labyrinth of love. Unfortunately no Medean guide was there to aid him. Dolores taught him soft Spanish phrases, sweet love songs, and looked them all.

She loved the señor, with her warm, impulsive nature, well, for the time being. The love, alack! was fickle as it was fierce. "The señor was poor," he said. Poverty was not nice. It meant black bread and brown sugar. Dolores dearly loved the good things of life, and shocked Jack by munching the sweetmeats he brought, when he talked of love.

While Jack was learning to love, Dare was learning to swim. Women fat and lean, young and old, united in wooing the briny deep, in parti-colored

bathing-suits. Bathing-suits! O, romance! where is thy victory? Troy never would have been conquered if Paris had seen the fair Helen in this costume; Actaeon never have perished if Diana had been so costumed; Anthony never have forgotten Rome if Cleopatra had emerged from the Nile in a dripping abomination of blue flannel.

Cannot M. Worth, out of his prolific brain, conjure something a little less than a deformity?

Dare was oblivious to appearance, bravely plunged into the water, and struck out for the raft. She reached it, shivering and blue, for Monterey water is only a few degrees above zero; excellent for bathing when one becomes accustomed to it; the only question being whether the result would be the same as in the case of the horse and the sawdust.

Dare stood with hands uplifted, prepared to dive. She struck the water with a ringing sound, then sunk. Mr. Barton dived after her, but she reappeared and swam to the shore, a very rosy water-nymph. As she ran up the sands to the bath-house, she saw Hugh Dartmore regarding her earnestly.

She groaned inwardly. "That man is a Nemesis, dogging my footsteps. He comes to the front always at the wrong time."

"Good morning, Mr. Dartmore." She held out her hand when she reappeared. "This is unexpected."

“You have forgotten to add pleasure.” He smiled. “I didn’t expect to be here so early. They wanted somebody to sketch and write up the new hotel, and so I am here. Mrs. Lel is a little under the weather: a cough, I think. She bade me tell you she was pining for a sight of you; and Rob, for your biscuits. They unintentionally divulged your secret, our appreciation was so great. Miss Dare,” he spoke suddenly, changing his tone, “I wish you would promise me not to dive again? I fairly trembled when I saw you try it.”

“If my friends are nervous, they better seat themselves behind the rocks. I am not obliging enough to forego my pleasure.”

“It is for your own sake I ask it.”

“I beg your pardon, I have passed the infantile age.” She walked rapidly ahead, half offended.

Dartmore smiled to himself. He was confident that he could thaw the iciness of her manners in time. He little reckoned icebergs oft wreck the venturesome mariner.





CHAPTER XI.

RETRIBUTION.

MRS. BRENT spent most of the time at the Del Monte, where the fashionables congregated, while Deb gave Richard's heart many a hard knock as she sent her ball over the croquet ground, and smiled bewitchingly at Mr. Thornton, who was very attentive.

Dare, however, not a little bored by this infliction of metropolitan manners and customs, said: "These people are like the dolls we cut out of gilt paper, all molded in the same fashion. They wilt under the fresh salt air." She groaned in spirit. She even forgave Dartmore, for the sake of his companionship in walks, rides, and search for sand fleas for bait.

"There is some excitement in catching sand fleas, they are lively," Dare remarked, as she knelt on the beach, endeavoring to catch some wily specimens.

Dartmore replied: "They are like hopes and ambitions in life: they hop off when we think we have them safely in hand. I don't like this odor of dried abalones wafted to us from Chinatown, even though you tasted one and pronounced it 'not bad.'"

"I've found out why they accumulate so much kelp. They send it to China for soup."

"We might stand bird's-nests—but imagine kelp soup on a bill of fare. Verily, the appetites of China are an anomaly."

"I have been pursuing my investigations," Dare laughed.

"They eat sharks as a retaliation, I presume. Where are your traps, Miss Dare? The town will make an admirable sketch."

"You must do the working"—she spread down a shawl on the sands—"I feel like being idle."

"Miss Dare," Dartmore called, after he had commenced work. "Please induce that Chinese baby to stay in the foreground a moment, her dress is a nice bit of relief to the browns and grays. Rouse into activity, for art's sake."

Dare lazily glanced at his sketch, and recognizing the infinite superiority over her attempts, felt a little cross. "Come, I'm going now."

"Very well," he replied quietly; "I don't like your authoritative tone."

"I am afraid you can't improve it," she retorted saucily.

"My company does not please you. Perhaps it were better for me to relieve you of it." He looked at her earnestly, half hoping for a protest.

"You are constantly on the alert to suspect me of intention to offend."

It was a luckless speech. Dare flushed angrily.

"I have never endeavored to fathom your deep intentions, nor wish to."

She gathered her materials together in silence, and walked rapidly away. All that evening she avoided him, doing the agreeable to Mr. Thornton, who accompanied Deb. Dare looked unusually well, as the light from the blazing pine cones danced over her face. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright from excitement, but her laugh grated harshly on Dartmore's ears as he sat talking to Mrs. Brent.

"I believe in marrying for money," she affirmed loudly. "Poverty is well enough in the abstract; in the concrete, it is unbearable."

"I agree with you," Mr. Thornton suavely replied.

"Your sentiments have changed," Dartmore said quietly, a pained look settling in his dark eyes.

Dare rushed on recklessly: "Man deludes poor

woman with false, fair appearances, like the wary spider, and she pays the fly's penalty after all. Poverty is bitter; 'when it enters the door, love flies out of the window,' is the correct sentiment.

"I am sorry for your opinion," Dartmore replied, and went on talking calmly to Mrs. Brent.

As *bon vivants* keep the choicest mouthful for the last, so the Brents reserved Cypress Point for the culminating glory of their trip. The day dawned cold and foggy. Nothing dismayed the family; and, with the addition of Miss Lily Barnett, they sped along through pine woods, past snow-white sand dunes with trailing pink and yellow verbenas clambering down their sides and nestling in their hollows, past beds of flowers blossoming in the arid soil, like brightest thoughts oft do in weariest brain, and sweetest songs in tired hearts.

They rode over wastes of sands, covered with brown kelp, by daintily tinted sea-mosses, and shells of many kinds, over which huge white-capped waves rolled and leaped in boisterous play, gray as the sky that arched above them. Drift-logs, sea-bleached, and bones of whales, ghastly looking, lay strewn over the beach.

They plodded through deep sands, over buried boulders, until the tops of the old cypress trees attested that they had reached the Point.

“An appropriate place for ‘ye who have tears,’” Jack shouted.

“It is dreary.” Deb wrapped her shawl closer around her.

“They are going to build a cliff house here. Then it will be delightful. You can sit on a piazza, with a glass, and have no need to tear your clothing on the horrid rocks,” Miss Lily informed them.

Dare spoke for the first time. “Waiters and champagne will be a sacrilege amid such grandeur. It would be enough to make the monks rise from their graves.”

“You echo my sentiments,” Dartmore rejoined.

The party seated themselves beneath a grove of cypress, sheltered from the winds. Dartmore was attentive to Miss Lily, much to her evident satisfaction. Dare slipped off, and climbed down the rocks to a little cove, curled up in a comfortable corner, and sat dreamily watching the receding tide. A long streak of luminous white lay along the horizon, but sky, water, rocks, and sand were of a violet-gray.

Dare was deep in meditation, when she heard a voice above, calling:

“Miss Dare, may I intrude?” Receiving no reply, Dartmore descended, and held out his hand.

“Let us be friends.”

“Certainly: it is immaterial,” she replied freezingly.

He did not appear to notice. “You have just such a nook as I would have selected for this afternoon. I told the others we were going to search for sea-anemones, so they will not expect to see us for an hour or so.”

“How could you tear yourself away from the fair Lily’s charms?” she asked sarcastically.

“I have come to talk to you; to tell you a story, if you care to listen. Whether it will interest you or not, Heaven knows.”

“I am fond of true stories. Being a newspaper reporter, you should be apt at recounting the startling.”

“Never mind,” he said, throwing his hat aside, leaning against a rock, and looking out over the ocean.

“Dare,” he said earnestly, taking her hand, “you must listen. It is life to me.”

She withdrew her hand impatiently.

“When I was twenty life was fair to me. Youth is always hopeful. My father possessed an abundance of this world’s goods; and there were only two of us. They were proud of my talents.” He laughed sarcastically. “They thought I would astonish the world. My father was a banker in

New York. He did not care for art, but denied me no opportunity. I graduated from college with a flourish of trumpets from indulgent relatives. My father sent me to Paris. I worked hard, although they never believed it. My mother regarded Paris as a second edition of Gomorrah, and laid all my sins at her door. Students will be wild. We led a gay life in the Quartier-Latin; but I was deeply in love—in fact, engaged to a daughter of one of the professors at home, and I kept my heart pure for Marie. Our larks were harmless.”

Dare sifted the sand slowly through her fingers, listening with averted eyes.

“I worked for three years patiently. My master encouraged me. ‘Work,’ he said, ‘patiently, constantly, long; that is the true secret of success.’ My head was full of high ideals; but my heart was divided between art and Marie.

“‘Love,’ our old master used to say, shaking his gray head—‘love must have no abiding-place in an artist’s breast. Art must reign sole mistress of heart and brain.’

“We laughed at him as a disappointed cynic. I knew my love for Marie inspired me, for I was striving to make a home and name for her sake.

“I loved her passionately, Dare; I worshiped her as a holy thing. I was an idiot.

“I saw no flaw, no imperfection in my idol. I sailed home; I was only twenty-three—a slight excuse for a portion of the folly. The steamer seemed to creep; the days seemed endless. Small-pox broke out among the steerage passengers. For the first time in my life, I knew fear. It was for Marie; I thought she prized my life. The captain came to us one night in the cabin, and said, ‘Some one must nurse the sick for the love of God’; they were dying like cattle in pens.

“Already ten had been buried in the sea. It was terrible. Sometimes now I can hear the groans of the dying mingled with the shrieks of the desolate living bereft of their dear ones. I thought of Marie; I knew she would bid me do my duty, even at the risk of death. You must not think it heroic. It was purely a selfish act, for Marie’s sake, my love was so great. One English lady who had had the disease volunteered with me. She was a saint. She took the disease, sickened, and died. I was left well and strong. There was a German emigrant family who succumbed to the plague, and died, leaving a daughter of about seventeen alone in the world. By this time we were in port, in quarantine. I was wild to go to Marie. Greta was so helpless, childish, and heart-broken, I took an interest in her. The upshot

was, I was kind, she was mistaken. She told me she loved me, had no place to go, and clung to me. I told her of Marie, and told her I would take her there. She was content. The ship was fumigated, and we were released. I took Greta, and went straight to Marie's home. I knew my mother was unreasonable, and could not abide anything foreign, and that Greta would receive an unwelcome reception from her. I had a vague idea that ladies needed companions, or something of that sort. Greta was well educated, so I thought she could serve in some such capacity. I sent up my card. My heart beat fast with the joyful expectation at seeing Marie again. I left Greta in the parlor, and went to the library.

“‘Marie!’ I cried, as she entered, and held out my arms. She looked as beautiful as a goddess. She was dressed in some pale blue clinging stuff. The color sickens me now. I am glad you are dark,” he said softly. Dare smiled coldly. “I felt as if I had received a blow.

“‘Well, Hugh,’ she said ironically, ‘you have come home with a future before you.’

“‘Yes, to work for you, Marie,’ I answered.

“‘And with a young woman, too, I understand.’

“‘Yes,’ I answered. I had forgotten Greta, and began pleading her cause, not noticing her sneering tones.

“‘Let me see the girl,’ she said coldly.

“I brought Greta to her. I could see Marie’s growing coldness. She looked at the child’s yellow hair, deep blue eyes. Greta was very pretty. A woman never forgives beauty in another, if she does forget sin. Greta by Marie looked as a wild flower beside a gorgeous tropical bloom. Marie was of a stately, classical type. I read Greta’s doom in her eyes.

“‘A pretty choice, Master Hugh; why did you not take her to your mother?’

“My mother was a descendant of the old Knickerbockers, very set in her ways, but Marie willfully would not understand, so I led Greta hastily away. ‘We two are outcasts,’ I laughed, though my heart was sore troubled. I asked Greta if she was willing to stay in a strange place alone. She lifted her blue eyes trustingly to mine, and answered:

“‘I will go wherever you tell me.’ I almost hated her then. Well, I found a lodging-place for her, and in time she obtained a small German class.

“My mother also doubted my story. ‘It was Paris,’ she said.

“Marie was changed. I still worshiped her. Men are fools,” he laughed bitterly. “She made me promise never to see Greta. I obeyed blindly.

The poor child was content, 'if it was for my happiness,' she said.

"Your Lel reminds me very much of her. Time went on. I never saw Greta. Our wedding day came. I was fool enough to be madly happy and blind. They said she was fooling me. I would not believe it. All was ready but the bride. The cruel shock comes back to me now." He shuddered. "The bird had flown to another keeper, and I was duped. O, it was horrible! It was cruel in Marie. I trusted her. Then I hated and loved her by turns. The old feelings were rooted too deeply to cast away. I don't remember clearly what followed. About a week after I found myself near Greta's lodgings. I went up, opened the door, and saw her bending over a table writing, looking thin and pale. 'Greta,' I cried. She ran to me with such infinite pity in her face I laid my head on the table, and sobbed like a child. Don't curl your lip, Dare. I was a dolt, but hear me out. She sat down by me silently. Suddenly I said, 'Greta, will you have what is left of me? I love Marie; God is my witness, I would tear it out if I could.' I told her I would care for her, and it would be better for both. Tears filled her sweet eyes, she put her hand in mine. 'Just as you wish,' she answered.

“‘We will go away from here,’ I said. ‘We will be married to-night.’

“She never questioned my bidding, but put on her wraps and followed me. We were married.”

Dare started, looked at him almost angrily. The sea moaned ceaselessly; no other sound broke the silence.

“I was a devil, she was an angel,” he continued. “My father discarded me, my mother chose to believe others, my sister sided with them; so Greta and I went to India. I had very little money, and was bitter and moody; she was always gentle and tender.

“Sometimes I was a brute. I could not love her, though half the men in Calcutta raved over her beauty. I gave up my art; that was sacred to Marie: I buried it with her memory. I enlisted in the English army. The heat was hard on Greta; it exhausted her, but she never complained. I was kind, but never loving. It killed her, Dare. One summer’s day she died; then I felt the desolation of loneliness, and cursed Marie in my heart. My after life was a black page—too dark to tell you, Dare. Greta was dead; no good angel watched over me. My father died and willed all his property away from me.

“I was a reckless, hardened man, for a woman’s sake. I left the army and drifted here.

“Marie is dead now, and I have forgiven her; my pulse never beats the faster at her name. This is churchyard work, raking over graves of the past, unsheathing skeletons. Dare”—he looked straight into her eyes—“you have taught me that life may hold something still for me. You are different from Marie. Thank God for it. I love you dearly. Love you perhaps not as fiercely as I loved in the old days, but with a man’s love, more true and lasting. Young people scoff at second love. A man may not love in the same way twice, but the second love may be as deep and pure as the first. I have not sought to burden you with any theatrical clap-trap. I have only told you the truth. Shall we bear the burden of life together?”

Dare endeavored to loosen her hand.

“No,” he said earnestly; “look into my eyes frankly, and tell me your decision. If yes—I am poor, but I think we could be happy together. Love sweetens poverty, Dare. If no—it will be the hardest blow misfortune has dealt me. It will be retribution.”

Dare turned away, watching the mists creeping over the ocean. She was silent.

Dartmore started to speak. “Ship ahoy!” Jack called. “Where are you two mooning?”

Dartmore offered Dare her shawl.

“Must I take silence for a refusal?” he whispered.

She silently nodded assent.

Dartmore turned aside for a moment. A suspicious moisture gathered in his eyes.

“It is retribution,” he murmured; then helped her carefully up the cliff.

“Where have you been?” the party exclaimed.

“I kept Miss Dare; it was my fault,” Mr. Dartmore courteously explained.

They rode home silently through the gloaming. Dartmore was sad at heart. The refrain—

“The tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me”—

rang through his brain like a funeral knell.





CHAPTER XII.

“I pray you, is death or birth
The thing men call so weary?”

THE pale morning light stole in between the closed shutters. Larks and sparrows filled the air with chatter of love songs. The yellow-breasted lark nearly burst his throat in radiance of melody. The flowers in the tall grass nodded a drowsy good morning to him. All nature proclaimed it, in fact, a good morning. The lizards crept forth, blinking their eyes, sunning themselves on moss-covered logs. Gray-coated squirrels peeped inquiringly from their earthy homes. The light in the east wakened the wavelets into a rosy glimmer, until they danced with joy, each one catching a glint of color, clasping it close in its embrace.

The pale rose-and-gold merged into azures. Morning dawned complete.

Dartmore stood by his window, looking out on the scene; but the grayness of Cypress Point filled

his heart. His eyes could not see the beautiful work of the sunlight.

Life had taught him it was useless to brood over the inevitable, and that one must wait patiently. It was poor comfort. He bowed his neck (not cheerfully) to the yoke of submission.

He knew his presence would be distasteful to Dare, so he packed up his belongings, leaving a note, with the usual excuse of important business, to satisfy Mrs. Brent.

He enjoyed the brisk, two-miles walk into town, caught the early train, and was back at his rooms by noon. The dust lay thick on books, papers, and a rough sketch of Dare's head on the easel. The ivy in the window looked black and tough, as if it had flourished on the walls of Westminster Abbey.

"Bah!" He shrugged his shoulders with disgust. "It smells like the crypts of Egypt. Balzac, old fellow," he said, taking up a worn volume and blowing the dust from its cover, "you are the keenest critic who ever saw through woman nature."

He looked at the sketch on the easel, and started to destroy it. Then sat down and laughed heartily.

"I am as foolish as a boy of sixteen; I will finish it and call it 'Dare.'" He tossed over the papers on the table carelessly and found a note. It read:

"Come to-night at six.

"RIVERS."

“Good!” he exclaimed. “Rivers is an excellent homeopathic antidote for misanthropical beings—‘*similia similibus*,’ etc.”

He sank down in an old arm-chair, worn out from his night’s sleeplessness, and slept profoundly, not even disturbed by visions of Dare. A knock at the door roused him. He rubbed his eyes drowsily, settled himself again to doze, imagining it the sound of the breakers against the rocks.

The knock was followed by the appearance of the landlady, in a smart red cap, with a countenance of carmine hue, which betokened no very remote Milesian ancestry.

“If you plaze, Mister Dartmore,” she said. “I’ve bin and pounded at your door fifty times. I thought to meself may be he’s bin and kilt himself entirely, like ‘54,’ who sp’ilt me new carpet instid of pisining hisself ginteelly—and I a hard wurkin’ woman. Surely, ef I knowed you’d bin home I’d cl’aned up a bit. Sophrony!” she shouted, in stentorian tones.

Dartmore took up his hat and beat a precipitous retreat.

Mrs. Malony ruled his garret, and himself to a certain degree. She delighted in governing, scrubbing, and in snubbing Sophonia, a romantic offspring of the house of Malony. She held her

legal lord in greatest contempt. He, in return, looked up to her with awe, pronounced her a "wondirful woman, sur," when the boarders found him shivering like a small black-and-tan on the doorsteps on a bleak morning, while Mistress Malony scrubbed the floor before breakfast, unheeding the weeping and wailing of five small editions of the tribe Malony.

"Mrs. Murphy—bad luck to her!—had said 'she had seen a spot of grase on her, Mrs. Malony's, floor.' Never, while there was a bit of skin on her bones, should a Murphy say that," she declared.

Mr. Malony faintly echoed from the outside, "Never!"

Dartmore bore up cheerfully with his surroundings; he even painted a portrait of the Mistress, attired in full war-paint, in deficit of a month's rent, when items and coin were scarce.

It was the pride of the possessor's heart. "Jist like Lady Barrownaught of Ballawack Castle, Patrick seys," she explained to admirers. A pleasant bit of fiction which, through oft repeating, she finally believed.

Dartmore walked to Rivers's lodgings; and as he ran up-stairs, the clear notes of a song filled the narrow, dusky hall—

"For bonnie Annie Laurie I'll lay me down and dee."

The voice sang on, ending in an improvised trill. A door opened. Dartmore saw Lel Arthur standing on the threshold, with a handkerchief wound around her head in Turkish fashion, and a broom in her hand.

“You look like a ghost, Mr. Dartmore. When did you come back? How is Dare?” she asked, in the same breath. “How you startled me! Come in.” She glanced ruefully at the disordered room. “I am cleaning up.”

“I have just fled from a ‘cleaning up.’ This confusion is decidedly more picturesque. I came up to see Rivers.”

“I am so glad. He has been laid up with rheumatism for several days. He won’t eat anything; talks of you, and growls. We don’t mind his gruff manner, for he has been very kind to us.”

Lel offered her visitor the sole unoccupied chair, and perched herself on the edge of the sofa.

“You look very different from the house-cleaner I just left,” he laughed. He then described the Malonys, until they both laughed together.

“Poor Sophronia,” Lel sighed; “when we are richer, she will do for a maid of all work. You haven’t told me anything about Dare.”

“Miss Dare is as charming as usual,” he replied, in a careless tone. “She lacks a little of your humanizing influence, Madam Lel.”

"She is worth all the rest of us put together," Lel warmly retorted.

Dartmore winced at the name, for the wound was fresh. He hastily excused himself, saying, "I imagine I hear poor Rivers groaning."

"Come down and take dinner with us, without *biscuits*," Lel said, hospitably.

"Thanks: if Rivers can spare me, I will be happy to accept your invitation." He went up to the top floor, and found Rivers swathed in flannel, hobbling up and down the room.

"So you've concluded to come at last," he growled, "Don't look at me. I am a sight. A battered old hulk."

Dartmore answered pleasantly: "I just received your message. I have been down to Monterey."

"Larking around is bad for fame, and bread-and-butter too, which is the more important of the two. Don't take to water, Dartmore." He raised his arm suddenly, but gently lowered it again with a groan of pain. "These marine fellows are good enough, but they can't do anything else well. I don't like narrowness in art. Confound this arm!" he ejaculated impatiently. "Help me to my chair, Dartmore. I am armless and legless now."

Paul Rivers was a man of sixty, an artist by profession, an oddity by practice. He lived up in an

attic, "to breathe pure air," he curtly affirmed. His hair was whitened by many winters' age; his face seamed with wrinkles; his eyes small, dark, and penetrating. One day as he was strolling in the art gallery, he heard a group of artists discussing the different schools of painting, and was attracted by Dartmore's ardent praise of the French style. He immediately corrected him testily in defense of the German; thereupon a fierce war was waged in the cause of Dusseldorf *versus* Paris. He roundly abused Dartmore, then shook hands with him, and invited him to his "tub." From that time forth the bond of friendship was sealed between them. Dartmore laughed at his cynicism, cherished his criticisms. Notwithstanding the difference of age, they lived like brothers.

"Dartmore," he groaned, "help me on the bed. My bones are getting too old. They have done their work; it is time for them to rest. The sooner worn-out horses, toothless dogs, and old men are put out of the world the better. I have dropped my brushes for the last time. My work is finished." He laughed grimly. "If I have never bettered the world, I have not harmed it. See that you can say as much. Ambition—bah!—Dartmore," he raised up, "is a notion. Folly, I say. It frets a man, it wears out body and soul. After all, it

benefits—what?—a handful of dust. I did not bring you here to croak. While you were away, I went to your rooms, encountered your Cerberus, didn't stoop to sops, had a fight, got your keys. I wanted to see what you were doing. I entered, and saw—”

Dartmore listened eagerly.

“I saw a great deal of bad.”

Dartmore's countenance fell.

“Also a great deal of good. You are young, only thirty-five—the prime of manhood. Bury the past, work for the future. Let the present go. My bane has been resurrecting the past. The sketch on your easel has talent in its lines. Work it up more in the Dusseldorf way. Finish smoother. It's the little one's sister down-stairs, eh?”

As he spoke, he noticed Dartmore's face grow grave.

“Whew!” he whistled. “Dartmore, you are in love! Poor fool!” he muttered beneath his breath. “I thought it was work.” He laughed heartily.

Dartmore frowned. “I do not see anything amusing in the idea, supposing it be the case.”

“No; nor did the frogs, in the stones, but the boys did. You are hit hard, boy. I did not think it of the little one's sister.” He glanced at him keenly. “I like her face. She has the true. Brent

spirit written in it, without Margaret Adair's foolish pride, I warrant. Persevere old fellow. Women are emigmas. The little one down-stairs is a sunbeam. The young fellow is a good, everyday man. Homespun wears better than broadcloth, though. Light the lamp. Here is our dinner. I declare, the little witch has waylaid Peter, and added a bowl of amber jelly to my plain fare. Thank the lady." He turned to Peter. "Ask her to come up in an hour or so."

"Dartmore," he said, "draw up the table. I feel reminiscent to-night. A sign of senility. Ever since I have seen the face on your easel, the eyes have haunted me, and recalled my old friend Alston Brent. We were boys in old Virginia. A sort of Damon-and-Pythias affair, until Margaret Adair separated us. Petticoats play the deuce between men. I went to Europe, and Brent married Margaret. The war broke out. I considered it a sort of cat-and-dog affair, surmised it would end with snarling, and remained in Germany. Brent joined the army. It was no question of right or wrong with him. It was his home. His whole heart and soul were with the South. Where a Brent deemed duty lay, a world could not move him. News came to me of his gallant fighting. Well, Dartmore. It was at Gettysburg. The men

were tired and disheartened. Colonel Brent was a soldier. He raised his colors, rode to the front, and was shot. He lay dying, and with his last breath gasped, "God save our South!" He left a wife and babes at home, and died for his cause. He lies buried far away in his South-land in a hero's grave, but forgotten, as most heroes are. While I—I lost my leg in a miserable duel at Heidelberg, for—a women, and lie here in a garret."

"I am glad you told me this," Dartmore answered quietly. "Tell Mrs. Arthur to bring Dare to you, and see if the father's spirit does not live again in the child."

"I don't want Margaret Brent to find me out," he answered irritably. "Women worry and pity one. I want to end my days in peace. Dartmore, I have made a will. Don't smile. My worldly goods are not immense"—he looked around the bare, comfortless room—"but I've a fancy for the form. Weak-minded people must indulge their fancies. This confounded rheumatism skirmishes pretty near my heart sometimes, and gives the old shell sharp tugs. Some day it will conquer. I want you to come then. You will find my will in that table drawer, with a miniature of Alston Brent; give the picture to the little one. Don't let them stare at me. Hustle me off. I'm only a pauper,

whom nobody owns. Why, Dartmore, I'm making you blue. I'm tough, and may outlast you all yet. I will dance at your wedding."

"That will never be," he answered gloomily.

"Be equal to the Greeks at Troy. Lay desperate siege again and again. If that won't do, try strategy."

"My fate would be like Leonidas's. My arguments would be so few, that even if brave, her countless charms would readily overpower them."

"I will compose an epitaph equal to the Spartans, in that case."

"Small satisfaction," Dartmore sighed moodily.

A knock sounded at the door. Lel entered, with Rob following in her wake. She went to the bed, shook up the pillows, turned the light down.

"Now you look more cozy, Diogenes," she said cheerily. "I've brought you some roses."

"I needed this living one more," he replied, kissing her soft hand.

"A compliment from Diogenes. Write it down, Mr. Dartmore."

"Sickness has subdued his growl, little one. You make me think of flowers, sunshine, and pleasant things."

"Rob, I am of some use, if I can't cook," she exclaimed merrily.

"I wish you were not obliged to, sweetheart," he answered tenderly.

"O, Rob! I don't mind trying anything for you." A look of reproach shone in her eyes.

"Can I do anything for you?" she turned to Rivers. "Rob and I are going to the theater. We are going to sit in the gallery, because it is cheap. The play is just as good."

"I'll warrant you will have more enjoyment in your corner than the people in boxes. Exclusive gentry, afraid to mingle with their fellow-creatures, lose the juice of life. To them, it is 'stale, flat, and unprofitable,'" Rivers said.

After they left, he turned to Dartmore.

"Don't take it too hard; Alston Brent's daughter will never make a mistake."

Dartmore pondered over his words as he walked home through the brightly lighted streets; and as he entered his dark room, he resolved to make himself more worthy of Dare's love.

The stars were shining over the city, looking down upon all its happiness, misery, beauty, and vice, peering into the depths of wretchedness. They shone upon the woman in the ball-room, full of life and merriment, and upon the lost one, cowering in some dark doorway. They lightened the face of the child at prayer, and their beams rested upon


the features of the dead. Nothing was hidden from their bright gaze. They poured their light into Dartmore's room, as he stood at the window counting the Pleiades in their glittering tangle. He thought the same stars were shining over Dare by the sea. A prayer was on his lips and in his heart, "that all would be well with her."





CHAPTER XIII.

A RIFT IN THE LUTE.

T was noontime in the last week of July. Roses were scattering their petals to the winds, and the fogs which gathered like a shroud round the Carmel hills were fast disappearing.

Laborers garnered the ripe grain in the fields. Children's voices sounded in merry laughter under the gnarled pear-trees in the old padre's gardens—trees that had witnessed the changes of a century; trees that had been planted by priestly hands, watched and nurtured by them in the new soil. As they grew larger, monks had paced under their branches, in black cowls, missals in hand, perchance fighting many heart battles. They had seen familiar forms grow old and vanish, buried in the Mission churchyard; they had seen faces take their place; and now little children climbed in their branches, caressed their twisted limbs, and played beneath

their shade until even. Birds builded their nests in the thick foliage, sang their love songs, reared their young, and fed off the small fruit unmolested.

Dolores, wicked one, sent the children away from their play-ground, and waited under the pear-trees—a love tryst. She draped a crimson shawl around her shoulders, twisted the loose hair on her forehead, coaxing it to curl, then drew a piece of looking-glass from her pocket, and smiled, well satisfied at the reflection.

The wind rustled through the willows that bordered the lane, but she heard the ring of a horse's hoofs.

“Dolores mia, are you waiting for me?” Jack cried, dismounting.

“What have you brought to-day, Juan?”

“Nothing, to-day, carissima. I thought you would care for me without the sweets. I was selfish, and wanted you all to myself.”

“Those chocolates were *so* good!” she sighed regretfully.

“I will promise, you little *gourmande*, that you shall be well supplied when I reach home. I must leave you to-morrow, darling. I shall return before Christmas; then you will go back with me as my wife.” Jack's brown eyes expressed a world of passion. “I know you will miss your freedom, but I

will make you happy, for I love you, Dolores, more than all the world. I shall tell only Dare. You will love her."

"I have seen her in Monterey. She looks too cold. She would chill pobre Dolores. I know she don't like sweets."

"Dolores! Dolores!" he answered playfully, "I believe you look upon our marriage as a state of sugar-plums, which you can munch *ad libitum*."

The shadows were creeping softly down the front of the old church. Jack looked at his watch.

"By Jove, it is five o'clock! Adios, Dolores, adios." He pressed her closely to his breast.

"Wait for me under the pear-trees Christmas eve. I will come to you, darling."

Jack rode hurriedly home.

"Where is Dare?" he asked, on entering the house.

"Sketching, down on the beach," Mrs. Brent replied.

Jack walked out, and met her on the way home.

"I want to tell you a secret, Dare," he began, impetuously. "I am in love."

Dare put down her things and whistled.

"Yes, with the dearest, sweetest—"

"Spare me a category of the fair divinity's charms. Give us her name?"

“Dolores.”

“Another blow for Mater. How could you, Jack Brent, go and do it?”

“Wait!” said he, with dignity; “do you remember the lovely creature who opened the gate for us at Carmel?”

“Yes; I noticed she was rather pretty, after the usual Spanish type. You ought to have seen the mother. I asked for some water at the house. She looked like a piece of ancient parchment. It is what all native Californians come to.”

“Bother the old woman: Dolores is different. I shall marry her,” he said firmly.

Dare walked on in silence, knowing men were obdurate in heart affairs.

“Deb wants to see you up-stairs,” Mrs. Brent said to Dare, as she entered the cottage.

“Well, I will obey the summons, and finish my packing.”

She found Deb seated on the edge of the bed, weeping. “You look like a modern edition of Niobe,” Dare laughed. “Hath the noble Richard much offended?”

“Don’t be silly; it’s awful this time. I have left Richard. We never, never will make up.” Tears completed her sentence. “He—is—gone.”

“What is the matter?” Dare asked, in perplexed tones.

“He told me not to go rowing with Mr. Thornton. Lily Barnett said that I ought ‘not to let Richard begin by ruling’; so I went. When I got back, he was in an awful temper. Dare, he sat down on a chair where my best bonnet was, and crushed it to atoms.” Fresh sobs interrupted the recital of her wrongs. “He said, too, he didn’t care a bit; so I didn’t care about the rowing, then.” Fierce sobs shook her frame. “The brute shook me, actually. I said, ‘I won’t live with such a man.’ He said, ‘You need not, madam.’ I answered, ‘I hope I will never see you again’; and he left the room, and I hope I never shall see him again. I am afraid to tell Mater. What shall I do? I will never forgive Richard—he will never forgive me—my bonnet is spoiled.” Deb was the type of despair, and sat, like Marius mourning amid the ruins of Carthage, bewailing—a *bonnet*.

Dare spoke sharply. “I don’t know much about married people; but my advice is to go home and ask Richard’s forgiveness.”

“Dare Brent, I thought you would side with me,” Deb cried indignantly. “I thought you upheld the rights of your own family.”

“So I do; but interfering with man and wife, whom God hath joined together, is very different. You must remember the old story of the bears—

‘bear and forbear.’ I think you have let the latter languish. You better feed him up.”

“You were never married,” Deb protested, tearfully. “Men are so inconsiderate. Richard never even notices if I look well. Dare, never marry.”

Dare laughed at her. “A month’s experience is very great, O worthy matron. You better write to Richard. I’ve no doubt he is mourning like the dove on the mast. Remember the doleful Douglas song, and repent. Forgiveness is the noblest act in the world. It seems ridiculous, my turning mentor. Like Sam Weller’s pies, advice is ‘wery fillin’;’ but I will promise not to tell Mater, if you make up in a week. If not, beware. Mr. Barton can be called away on business. O, business, how many falsehoods are committed in thy name! How many weak-hearted husbands cover themselves under thy welcome cloak to wander forth to forbidden pleasures! How many youths invoke thy name to avert the wrath of indignant mammas! Excuse the apostrophe, Deb. It is *a propos*.”

“Deary me!” Dare sighed, when they reached San Francisco the following night. “I feel as if I had the burden of Atlas on my shoulders, with all these secret woes.” She was tender-hearted, and pitied Hugh Dartmore, even when she could not love him.

“There are two now.” She counted her discarded lovers grimly, as an Indian warrior numbers the scalps at his belt: though with less satisfaction, for her conquests brought her more pain than pleasure.

The next day Mr. Thornton called on Deb.

“You must go down, Dare,” she entreated; “tell him I have small-pox—or anything.”

Dare obeyed; excusing Mrs. Barton, she delved into all the scientific subjects she had absorbed from Dr. Lloyd, and so confused the young man, whose brains were not equal to his fortune, that he afterwards declared to Miss Barnett, “the dark Miss Brent was a little out of her mind.”

Miss Lily smiled an assent so sweetly that he was brought to a declaration then and there, with mamma as witness.

After her call, Dare walked to Lel’s rooms, and surprised the little matron in the midst of a nap; from which she awakened her, like the prince in the fairy story, with a kiss.

“I am so glad you have come, Dare,” she said, crying just a little for joy.

“You look pale, little one,” Dare answered, “How is your cough?”

“Did Mr. Dartmore betray me?” Dare blushed, and wise little Lel kept discreetly silent.

“Nothing has happened since you left, Dare. I

am a little weak sometimes, and Rob works so hard."

"Lel"—Dare clasped her close in her arms—"you must not be sick. I could not bear it. Mater must forgive you."

"That does hurt me." She smiled a sad, sweet smile. "Wait a little longer; Rob is going to have a new coat. Mother shall not see my husband shabby."

"Mr. Dartmore is going to Arizona," she added quietly. "Rob will miss his friend. Mr. Barton came to see us last night. He looks very grave and pale. He said Deb was staying a while with mother. He seemed greatly troubled over something. He promised to come again this evening."

"You jewel!" Dare embraced her. "You shall be chief actor in a drama of reconciliation; this room the stage. Keep Mr. Barton, this evening, until late."

"Won't you come up-stairs with me, for a peep at Diogenes?"

"Certainly; but I am not partial to snarling people."

Mr. Rivers bade them welcome. "My sister, Dare Brent," Lel presented her.

"Well, so this is the wonderful Miss Dare. My ears still ring with the sound of your praises." He held out his hand cordially.

“I hope, sir, they are not affected seriously,” Dare retorted.

“The true Brent spirit,” the old man chuckled to himself. “They say you paint. Lots of daubing is done in this world, and good canvas spoiled by people imagining they possess genius; but it is visible only to themselves. I would like to see some of your attempts. The little one would have me believe they distance mine or young Dartmore’s.”

“You know I never said that,” Lel interposed, in distressed tones.

“Your honest eyes looked it,” he laughed. “This Miss Dare is the embodiment of perfection in your eyes.”

Lel glanced uneasily at Dare, whose color was rising, and she knew by the expression of her eyes that wrath was simmering.

“Let us go,” Dare said sharply; “I am not accustomed to being ridiculed.”

“If you will be seated, I will not offend again,” the old gentleman said, with a gleam of amusement in his eyes.

At the end of an hour Dare went home, charmed with Mr. Rivers, but irritated by his constant praise of Dartmore. She left Lel completely in the dark in regard to her intentions, bidding her adieu in mysterious tones.

Dare invited Deb to take a walk after dinner, claiming Jack as an escort, who looked sulky at the appropriation.

He growled, "Hurry up, girls, I've got to see a man down town."

"That inevitable man," Dare sighed. "I should think he would be worn to a shadow by constant waiting. I am beginning to believe he is as mythical as a Norse divinity—a sort of Israelitic scapegoat, that bears many sins of omission and commission. Jack, how is Bayard progressing?"

"Splendidly; she is in prime condition for the fall races. They have imported some Eastern stock, but I have no doubt she can distance them all. She will help win Dolores for me," he whispered softly.

They met Mr. Jones face to face as they walked down the hill.

"Rumor doth double like the voice and echo," he remarked. "I heard of your arrival in town, and was on my way to welcome you home again."

"Jones, you are opportune." Jack slapped him on the shoulder. "Please see these ladies to their destination, for I have some business to attend to."

"Certainly," Jones responded, with alacrity. "Miss Dare's eyes are loadstars—"

"Really, Mr. Jones, spare us the rest. My

tongue cannot well be compared to 'sweet air more tunable than lark to shepherd's ear.'"

Jones blushed.

"We are going to Deb's house, the hostess willing or otherwise. I want your help in getting up a Bohemian supper. First we will take in Lel."

Deb and Jones resigned themselves meekly to her guidance. When they reached their destination, Dare bade them wait outside until she prepared Lel for the influx of visitors.

She called Lel aside and told her to hide Rob in the kitchen. "Then we will make a call on Diogenes, and usher Deb innocently into the room with her liege lord. That is the plot of my drama, wondering Lel. It is called Reconciliation, or a patent cement for conjugal infelicities. Like Bottom, my part is simply to roar. We are all to accompany them afterwards to the Barton mansion, and celebrate."

"What if they don't make up?"

"I intend they shall."

Lel instructed Rob, while Dare asked Deb, with an innocent expression, to please wait in the room until they went up-stairs to see how old Mr. Rivers felt.

The entry was dark; the light in the room dazzled Deb's eyes, and she could not see objects clearly at first.

Mr. Barton saw his wife's bonnie face, and thought she had become repentant. "Deb!" he cried joyfully, holding out his arms. "I have been so miserable without you; but I knew you would come back to me. You would not respect me if I always gave in first."

Deb was taken completely by surprise. She laughed hysterically. They made up, however, without a bit of yielding from obdurate Deb.

"I was a bear, and I will get you the prettiest bonnet in town," Richard declared.

"This is a trap of Dare's," Deb soliloquized.

"We will vow never to quarrel again, and be more lenient with one another," Richard said fondly.

"I will fatten up my 'forbear.'" Deb kissed him.

"It's awful hot here," a voice called from the kitchen. "I am tired holding my fingers in my ears. May I come in?"

"I had forgotten Arthur," Mr. Barton laughed, and opened the door. A sound of merry voices rang through the hall, and the rest of the company entered.

"Bless you, my children; the curtain falls," Dare announced theatrically.

"Good evening, ladies," Dartmore greeted them.

He stood in the doorway unobserved, the small room being full.

“Now for the *envoi*,” Dare said. “Jack will meet us at the Barton mansion.” She accepted Mr. Jones’s proffered arm, and Dartmore excused himself from following.

He could not just yet endure the sight of the woman he loved. His jealous fancies conjured up torturing visions, and he could have cheerfully choked poor unsuspecting Jones.

After the house was silent, he went to Rivers’s room and looked in. The old man seemed sleeping quietly, so he stole softly away. But Rivers was wide awake, his brain busied with memories the gay voices and young faces had invoked.

“God grant,” he prayed, “they may be worthy of Alston Brent’s name, and that I may do for them as he would have done for me.”





CHAPTER XIV.

A PASTORAL ROMANCE.

OCTOBER was rapidly nearing. July perished with the roses. August followed with clusters of purple and golden grapes; but the vintage was over. The fruit lay distilled in bottles—sparkling champagne, amber Riesling, or mellow Zinfandel. The breezes blew a little fresher through the Golden Gate—the only sign that betokened the fall of the year.

Mr. Jones had waxed more devoted as the year grew shorter, and Dare did not repulse his attentions. One bright day he proposed a sketching trip. She eagerly consented, for Ugolino still remained in *medias res*, and she longed for ‘green fields and pastures new.’

Jack was a changed boy in those days. His light-heartedness had gone, and he was moody and irritable. “He had sucked the orange dry at

twenty-one," he affirmed. "Life held only the bitter rind for him."

Dare felt the change in his character keenly. "I know it is Dartmore's influence," she thought again and again. "He has imbibed cynicism from him." Dare little knew that it flowed from his own hard experience.

Jack was going over the bay to look at Bayard, installed at the Bay View Trotting Park, and Dare and Mr. Jones accompanied him as far as the race course, promising to meet him there again in the afternoon.

They wended their way towards the cañon above the University, the sole available spot productive of picturesqueness.

"I feel qualms of conscience at letting you carry my paint box," Dare said; "so I shall take the lunch basket under my protection."

They stopped about a mile up the cañon, where a bend in the creek and some good rocks for a foreground formed excellent materials for a sketch.

"Mind, no criticisms until it is finished," Dare said, as she set up her easel.

The day was perfect, the atmosphere intensely clear, the sky a vivid blue, flecked by a few filmy clouds borne along by the wind like the steeds of dawn before the rosy Phœbus.

Dare settled down to work, Jones to idleness.

"All this is but a dream, too flattering sweet to be substantial," he murmured.

"When we come to the cold chicken you will wake to reality," she answered. "Art is conducive to hunger."

"I could stay here forever," he continued, unheedingly; but "'so quick bright things come to confusion.'"

"There goes a small dog; I know he has designs on the lunch basket."

Jones was forced to give up Shakspeare, and throw stones at the offending canine.

"My rocks resemble feather beds." Dare held her head to one side with an art-connoisseur air. "What shall I do to solidify them?"

"I cannot help you. Please put up your work for a while, Miss Dare, I want to talk to you."

"Time's too precious to be lost. I will have pity, though, and we will lunch."

"A *tete-a-tete* picnic is a *chef-d'œuvre!*" Jones declared enthusiastically. "Picnics with crowds are insufferable bores."

"I have no plates, Mr. Jones, you must put up with leaves as substitutes. It wouldn't be genuinely rural with dishes. Here's a cup, though. Please bring me some water."

“Like Ariel, I would circle the world at your bidding.”

“Take your choice of edibles, Mr. Jones. You positively refuse another sandwich? Your fasting is alarming. You must have dyspepsia.”

“Dyspepsia of the heart,” he answered, meaningly. “It requires a remedy.”

Dare started up abruptly, brushed the crumbs off her lap, and resumed work. “I forbid you to utter a single word this afternoon,” she said firmly. “I am going to work.”

“And I am going to talk.”

“Mutiny in the ranks must be quelled. I won’t answer.”

“You shall.”

“I won’t.”

“Miss Dare.”

She painted steadily on.

“Miss Dare,” he called again.

“Don’t bother me.” She spoke sharply. “The shadows are changing rapidly.”

“I don’t intend to let concealment prey on my cheek,” he retorted. “Miss Dare, tell me what you think of me.”

“You are egotistical in imagining that I think at all about you.”

“Of course we have some opinion about every-

body we know. I have not been blessed with beauty."

"I hate a pretty man." Jones's spirits rose.

"Well"—she surveyed him critically—"you will do, as a boy."

He subsided.

"Quotations cling to you like barnacles to a rock. Take the knife to them."

Jones scored a mental resolution to bury Shakspeare as thoroughly as he had Bourdon in his college days.

"I think you are lazy. You have talents, and won't improve them. You need a little California vim, and less Fredericksburg beer. Don't ask so many questions. It isn't becoming for small boys."

"You must listen," he said earnestly. "I am going to tell you that I love you. Don't be hard on a fellow. Sometimes I have hoped you cared for me. If you only will, I will work so hard."

"You don't mean such nonsense," she said hastily. "Go to Arizona, Oregon, Colorado, or some new place, and work. In a month you will laugh at your foolish fancy."

"Never!" He stooped to kiss Dare's hand, and was very much surprised to see her spring up the bank and flee. He looked around. A bull was fast making his way towards him. Jones was

dumbfounded. To the left of him, to the right of him, lay avenues of escape, but the bull was upon him. He barely had time to climb an oak when the animal reached the spot, glaring at him with an evil eye. He pawed the ground, and bellowed in true Castilian style, but Jones did not relish the part of matador; besides, he was weaponless. The animal rushed at the tree, as if he would uproot it. Jones climbed to the summit, where twigs were weak as human hopes. He racked his brain with a review of natural history, thankfully deciding it was bears and not bulls that belonged to the climbing species.

The beast sniffed at Dare's paints, decided he was not fond of turpentine and siccatif for a meal, and overturned the easel with his nose; but still kept vigil under Jones.

The gates of Hades were never more sacredly guarded than that tree by a big, red bull.

Something had maddened him. Perchance the day's herbage had not been to his royal taste. Jones's hair was firey. Could he have mistaken it as a signal to combat?

It was growing late, but still that bull held his post. Dare climbed to the top of a hill, looked down upon the scene, and actually laughed. Jones failed to appreciate the humor of the situation.

She started towards Berkeley to obtain assistance; but Jones overtook her before she arrived, looking as calm as if he had been enjoying a pleasant *siesta* in a hammock. On their trip home he ventured to whisper: "I dare to hope; with Lysander, 'the course of true love never runs smooth.' This afternoon, alas! has been all too swift and short."

"Except the hour in the tree," Dare replied mischievously.

He ignored the reference. "Will you not give me some hope? 'My love is deep; the more I give to thee, the more I have: for both are infinite.' Do you care for anybody else?" he demanded abruptly.

"O, yes; I love Jack."

"Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum," he interrupted, vehemently.

"It is useless, Mr. Jones, you will forget it."

"Simple to bid, but hard to accomplish," he said bitterly. "Lethe is a stream unattainable for lovers. I shall go to Arizona; if I return with a fortune, will you change your mind, Miss Dare?"

"Never!" she replied shortly and firmly. He bade her adieu, tragically telling her if she heard of his bones bleaching on Arizonian sands it would be her work.

Dare laughed unsympathetically, and sighed as she wondered why all of her friends should turn to lovers.

"The races come off this day week. Bayard is in splendid trim," Jack said, as they walked home. "Things will look brighter then, sis."

"A messenger boy brought a note for you, Dare," Mrs. Brent said, as she entered the house. "I suppose it is an invitation."

Dare opened it. Her face paled and flushed by turns. She crumpled it in her hand, smoothed it out again, reading it over and over. Then she handed it to Mrs. Brent.

"I do not know such people," she replied coldly.

"Mater, it is our little Lel."

"Dear sister Dare," she read aloud, in tones of disdain. "A nice way for a common stranger to address my daughter."

"He is Lel's husband," she retorted defiantly. "He is a gentleman. I have deceived you, Mater. I have been to Lel, hoping time would soften your heart, and now I know she was waiting for the baby's coming. How can you, being a mother, cast her off? She needs you sorely. You can comfort her as only one mother can another. Life is so short, and Lel may die." Tears filled Dare's eyes, her voice trembled. "Go to her. I know it

is not a child's place to tell her mother her duty. Forgive me, for I love her so."

Mrs. Brent regarded her calmly.

"Well done, Dare. I hope you are not aspiring to the stage by way of an additional disgrace? I simply look upon it as an unfortunate circumstance that Eleanor should perpetuate the Arthur name. I am very much displeased at your breaking my express commands; but in the future shall have no objection to your visiting any charity patient."

Dare's eyes flashed. Then she asked humbly, "Have you no word to send to her in her pain and happiness?"

Mrs. Brent turned away and left the room.

Dare re-read the note.

"DEAR SISTER DARE—God has sent to us a gift from heaven. We want you and Lel's mother to come as soon as possible."

She told the news only to Aunt Judy, who sobbed:

"Bress de Lord. De Lord be praised. I toted de honey lamb in my arms." Aunt Judy's steaks were burnt, and coffee muddy, at dinner, for the news filled her old eyes with tears. "Jest take little miss my lub," she said; and Dare longed for the mother love she also fain would carry but could not.

There was a stillness in the air as she entered the lodgings. The seamstress on the first floor had covered her bird's cage to silence its song. "We all love her," she said to Dare. "She has a kind word for everybody."

The grim landlady brushed the tears from her eyes as she tip-toed softly down the creaking stairs. "She's sich a baby herself, and no mother nigh her."

Dare opened the door softly, and peeped in. All was dark. A nurse held up her finger with a warning "Hush."

As her eyes became used to the darkness she saw Lel lying in the bed like a pure, white lily—her face was so white, and her hair covered the pillows in a golden wave. Rob sat motionless by her side, leaning his head upon his hand.

"Dare," Lel called, in a weak, low voice. "I am so glad you have come. And mother? She will come?" she demanded eagerly. "I knew she would forgive when baby came. Tell her not to wait. I want her now. I am just starved for a sight of her."

Tears coursed down Dare's cheeks as she went to Rob and whispered, in heart-broken tones: "You must tell her. I cannot."

"Lel," Rob took up a thin white hand and kiss-

ed it tenderly. "Bear up, sweetheart. Maybe your mother will come later. My darling, you have paid dearly for clinging to me."

She moaned as if in pain. "Lean down to me, Rob. I cannot see you well." She clasped her arms about his neck. "It is hard," she spoke, in a low voice. "It is hard to give up your own mother forever. All through these long months I have thought, only a little longer waiting, and she will forgive. Now, Rob, I have only you, the baby, and Dare. You see I am rich after all, my husband." She kissed him again lovingly. "Show Dare my little baby," she said, and then fell into a quiet doze.

Rob went into the tiny kitchen where Dare was waiting for him.

"It isn't fair," she cried angrily, as he entered. "It is cruel. Sometime I hope Mater will pay dearly for it."

"Hush, Dare. You are not yourself, to wish so wickedly. The good God watches over us, and knows what is best. 'He doeth all things well.'"

"It is the hardest thing in the world to feel, 'Thy will be done.' I can't just yet. Do you think Lel will get well?"

"I trust God will spare her to us for many a long year. I will go and ask the autocrat of the house if you may see the infant."

Rob returned triumphant, with a bundle of flannel, and after much unwrapping thereof disclosed a wee, wrinkled face, with eyes blinking like an owlet at the light. It began to howl.

“Lay on, Macduff!” Dare exclaimed. “A bit of the Brent temper. I thought babies were sort of good-looking. This one is a libel on Lel.”

“Her mother would differ with you. She thinks it beautiful. I am not a judge of such matters.”

“Let me stay,” Dare entreated; “I cannot go home to Mater.”

“No,” Rob refused firmly; “your duty lies first with your mother; if Lel should grow worse, I will send for you. I pray God to bring her safely through her trials, and spare her to me. Lel has taught me to hold life very dear for her sake.”





CHAPTER XV.

“FAITES LE JEU.”

DARE went around the house in a state of beatification for the next few days. Mother and infant were progressing finely; and being relieved of all further anxiety on that score, she resumed painting, devoting herself to buds and flowers, with the idea of improving the baby's taste.

Jack was jubilant. “Dartmore is a judge of horse flesh,” he affirmed. “He says my mare can easily distance the other. She is a flyer.”

“Now we must plan and settle down for the future,” Dare admonished wisely. “We have led happy, careless lives, like children, and living should be earnest work for men and women. Our play days are over. It is time we were helping bear the burden in earnest. You must go seriously to work, Jack, and give the slip to Dame Chance.”

“Bother, sis, you're getting prosy. I shall marry

Dolores, cut stocks and Sterns. Give a fellow a chance to sow his wild-oats."

Wild-oats: they are easily sown, but the reaping oft yields a bitter harvest.

"I am going to see Lel this afternoon," Dare said, looking wistfully at her mother who entered; but Mrs. Brent vouchsafed no reply, and—she walked alone to the lodgings. "You look ever so much better," Dare said gayly, kissing the small mother.

"Not just yet, dear," she said, in answer to Lel's searching look. "She may come by and by. Aunt Judy sent you some jelly. Who is that timorous-looking creature in the kitchen? A second edition of Tilly Slowboy?"

"She is an oddity. Mr. Dartmore sent her to me for a nurse girl. My only objection to her is that she dodges every time you speak to her, as if she expected something thrown at her head. The baby takes to her, however, and I dare say she will improve. I am going to name the baby Margaret, after mother."

"How can you?" Dare asked.

"Because my love is greater than my pride."

"I must go now, but I will come to-morrow night and tell you of the race. We will win. I don't like Jack's being mixed up in sporting matters, but after this is over we will all begin anew. Thank

God we have done nothing that can leave a stain. I heard Mr. Rivers was not well, and I will run up to see him for a moment."

Dare knocked. She stood irresolutely in the doorway when she saw Dartmore, but went in and held out her hand in greeting. He had said the mare would win, and she could forgive him everything.

"Where have you been all this time?" Mr. Rivers asked.

"Forming new resolutions," Dare laughed.

"I warrant breaking them before the words were cold. A woman's resolutions are not worth the wasted breath."

"You forget Charlotte Corday, Joan D'Arc, and other historical dames," Dartmore interposed.

"Rubbish, rubbish," Rivers growled. "Gallantry comes to the rescue. They were all maniacs, I say. Have you brought the sketches," he turned to Dare. "Prepare to hear the plain truth. This enameling of that time-honored quality does for young people. I believe in wholesome allopathic doses. They do people good—kill or cure imaginary evils."

"A little judicious praise is like sugar to the stomach—often necessary, and very wholesome."

"Not for beginners, Dartmore."

“You would have annihilated a Keats,” Dartmore rejoined. “Too much censure, even if deserved, is like deluging a plant with water to stimulate it. It either kills it or blights its fair buds of promise.”

“Platitudes.” Rivers shook his head. “Mere fine words. If one possesses the divine spark, mountains could not extinguish it. Raphael would have won renown if his only canvas had been a prison wall. The world is full of smatterers in the arts. Root them out. They obtain half the credit that genius deserves.”

“The tendency of the age is to encourage mediocrity. The world has reached a materialistic standpoint. The tortoise is old-fashioned. The hare is proclaimed victor that springs the quickest to the goal, by fair means or foul. Greed of gain is the popular motto, and the golden calf is raised high on the altars.”

“You are right, Dartmore: a man is measured by his value in coin. The treasures of a Cræsus would far outweigh the genius of a Reubens in this present day. Genius languishes because no incentive is offered for work. In time we will become a nation of money changers, to whom brains are a superfluity, and cupidity the only mental necessity.”

“You gentlemen are growing bitter in your reflections,” Dare interrupted. “One is apt to judge the world by the way in which it has dealt with him. Carlyle says: ‘What act of legislature was there, that thou shouldst be happy? A little while ago thou hadst no right to be at all.’”

“It is man’s injustice to man we are grumbling over,” Dartmore answered. “The trouble is all in a nutshell. It is due to the animal’s natural selfishness. That is the basis of all natures. By selfishness, ill-will is born, causing men to be chary of justice.”

“Growling is an inherent quality, too,” Rivers said. “Let us see the sketches.”

“I expect due allowance for roughness,” Dare laughed.

Rivers looked at them, then at her, with a comical smile. “You are not a genius, my child. The flower studies are excellent in tone. The figures are abominable. You have attempted too much. They are quite as bad as I expected.”

Dare *was* disappointed, but she smiled bravely.

“Excuse me,” Mr. Dartmore said, “this horse’s head is good. It is painted *con amore*. It has spirit.”

“Sugar and water,” Mr. Rivers protested. “Keep on, Miss Dare. I like your breadth of

handling. You will not find all audiences so critical."

"Come again some day, notwithstanding Diogenes's growls. I have as great faith as Carlyle in work," Dartmore said.

"That girl has grit," Rivers remarked, as she closed the door. "She is of the kind that adversity will develop, and harsh criticism incite to better work."

"Her sketches, like everything she does, are good," Dartmore said.

"They surpass lots of the trash that sell in shops as pictures. The work is better for her than society or dress. Dartmore"—Rivers spoke abruptly—"I want you to win my old friend's daughter. Together you will rub each other's angles down. I am going to try to enact the role of a match-maker for once, and if you repent the bargain, I'll have none of you. You must make a choice between love and fame. Leicester, in the novel, stifled love, but fell like Lucifer. Art brooks no rival."

"Genius raised to an altitude by smothering all human emotions is the very essence of isolation. The snow-capped grandeur of an Alpine peak will do for youth. When age creeps on us, Rivers, we have a yearning for valley lands and companion-

ship; for 'the night must come wherein no man can work.'

"I am convinced, Dartmore, you have a future before you, but if you cumber yourself with bread-and-butter cares, I will not answer for the consequences. Man must have his mind clear and free from cares to succeed as a great artist. He must possess the Fra Angelico adoration, and indifference to earthly things. Think of impressing a heavenly spirit into a group of angels, when you are hoping that each angelic smile will help to mollify the unappreciative butcher."

"I don't ask much from the future," Dartmore answered moodily. "There are hundreds of boys in Paris whose sketches would put mine to shame. I would rather pass my life with a woman like Dare Brent for my wife than obtain the renown of a Corot."

"Foolish man," Rivers said scornfully. After Dartmore left he said to himself half bitterly, "He has chosen the better part."

The pale flowers blooming in a box on the seamstress's window-sill below nodded an assent, as if they, too, thought love far better than fame or wealth.

The day of the race dawned crisp and clear. Jack looked as handsome as a young Adonis, his face beaming with hope and joyful expectation.

"Big bets have been made on the other mare. Reckon a good many will be fleeced to-day," he remarked confidentially to Dare.

The park was crowded. The Brent family occupied a carriage next the railing, commanding a fine view of the home stretch.

"Good afternoon, Miss Dare." Dartmore lifted his hat. "You look excited."

"I feel so. It would not be well for me to have lived in Greco-Roman times, where this thing happened often."

Jack passed to the stables, went up to the mare and patted her tenderly. "Bayard, don't fail me," he whispered; "run for my life, my happiness, your glory."

The animal rubbed her head against his hand, as if she understood and would say:

"Never fear, I will save you."

The horses were led out. Bayard tossed her head proudly in the sunlight. The jockeys mounted their horses, and the signal sounded for starting. Bayard was off like the wind; the jockey held a slack rein. The warning bell sounded. The horses were recalled. Three times they made the attempt. "The blue jockey holds Swallow in on purpose to tire Bayard," Dare exclaimed angrily, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

At last the judge said "Go!" and they were off.

The mares were of the same chestnut color, and every muscle was strained to its utmost tension as they sped around the track, like "meteors hurled from the planet world."

Dare stood up in the carriage when they passed the first curve. "Bayard, try for us!" she cried, in entreating tones, as Swallow gained on Bayard's tracks.

"God grant," she prayed to herself, "Bayard may win."

They were on the home stretch. The excitement was intense. Men threw up their hats, and hurraed for the California mare until they were hoarse. She was straining every nerve. She passed Swallow, and the heat was won.

Dare sank back in the carriage exhausted. "Don't speak to me, Mater," she implored, "I am so happy."

"Hurrah, girls!" Jack came up radiant. "It's a dead sure thing now. Only I don't like the way my jockey handles the reins. Pools are raising. The gambler crowd are betting high on Swallow. I'd like to see them shaved."

Jack returned to the stable. "I will give you fifty dollars if we win, Bill," he said to the jockey, who grinned in return, muttering to himself:

“Gold can’t take that little sting of my gentleman’s whip from my shoulder.” He said aloud, touching his cap:

“The mare can do it, sir.”

The horses were called for the next heat. Bayard plunged ahead—stumbled. Swallow gained half a length. They ran even, neck and neck. The people were growing mad with excitement. The jockey seemed holding Bayard back. “Why don’t he let her go?” Dare cried.

“He is saving her strength,” Jack replied curtly.

The goal was reached. Swallow won by a neck. Tears filled Dare’s eyes.

The final heat was called. A great silence fell over the multitude as the horses were led on the track. The bell sounded. Bayard started ahead. Swallow was hard upon her heels. It looked to Dare as if the jockey waited for her to gain. Dare’s face grew pale as death when they neared the stand; her eyes were fixed. Now Bayard led, now Swallow. The boys near averred the jockey held Bayard in until her mouth bled from the bit.

Swallow passed her, and won amid the cheers of the gamblers. The crowd joined, for the world has little sympathy with losing horse or man.

Dare’s head swam; she could not realize it.

“You are as white as a sheet,” Mrs. Brent ex-

claimed. "I hope this experience will teach Jack to let racing alone."

"It will kill him," Dare replied.

"Mr. Dartmore, please bring me a glass of water," Mrs. Brent said. "Drink it, Dare, you will feel better."

"Jack has left the track, and commissioned me to look after you, and tell you he will not be home to-night," Dartmore said.

"You must find him," Dare implored. "It is not right that he should bear his trouble alone."

The blow stunned Jack, it was so unexpected and sudden. He reeled like a drunken man. He could not believe it.

"It hurts, does it?" the jockey asked tauntingly, when they were alone. "Gentlemen gets pretty sharp licks sometimes." Jack flushed angrily, then bit his lip and remained silent. He realized he was a ruined man, hanging over an abyss, with no hope possible. He went to the mare and looked at her sorrowfully. She dropped her head as if she was human, and refused her oats. "You have ruined me," he groaned. "I have nothing left but life; I wish that, too, was over." Jack left the track.

Bill laughed coarsely as he passed. "I likes to see thet young un's feathers fall. I owed him one, and now we's quits."

“How?” his companions asked.

“You know Sterns, sort of a broker fur them Frisco chaps. Well, he gin me a cool hundred to throw it.” He winked knowingly. “Bill Jenks ain’t the chap to refuse an honest penny. I tell you, the little beast pulled. She’s a flyer, ef she hed a chance.”

“Thet’s a dead give away, Bill.”

“All the jedges in Ameriky can’t prove it. You dunno race laws, my covey. We makes ’em and keeps ’em—mum.”

“I s’pose he’ll have to sell her.”

“Sterns hes offered five hundred down. Brent’s thet fond of her as if she be a woman.”

Jack was satisfied of foul play. He realized, though, he might just as well have battled against a Xerxian host single-handed as try to prove it. He had lost, that was all. He walked the streets all night. No condemned man ever spent a more horrible period of torture than he did in those few hours. Life was blackness to him. A terrible feeling—darkness, without one ray of starlight to brighten its gloom. He went to his employer’s office before daylight, entering by a pass key, and added up his debts, placing Bayard in the balance. For stocks, assessments, gambling, they amounted to the thousands.

"My God! what can I do?" he cried, despairingly. His eyes rested upon an empty check book. A thought flashed through his brain. He copied for his employers, and by a singular coincidence, his handwriting and Mr. Gordon's were very similar. It was the old, old story of temptation and human weakness. He tore a leaf from the book, filled out a check for ten thousand, and sat there trembling like an aspen leaf.

The morning light crept into the office, revealing files of papers, rows of calf-bound ledgers, and the ashes of a burnt check book in the grate. It rested upon a pale, ruined man—a criminal. The boyishness had vanished from his face, the lines were hard and bitter. He had sinned. Although he did not see the prison bars, he felt them in his soul. Worn out, he fell asleep in the straight-back leather chair, and was awakened by the office boy shaking him.

"Don't let them take me," he cried wildly. Wakening thoroughly, he stammered in excuse: "I must have been dreaming, Jim. I came here last night because I was sick; it was so far home."

Jim gave a knowing wink. "Drunk, more likely," he thought.

Jack Brent went out into the air. He dreaded Sterns more than he did his employers; so during

bank hours he cashed his check, and paid his debts.

Sterns grumbled with disappointment. The mare was still beyond his grasp.

Jack returned to the office, but all day he glanced around uneasily when any one entered. Crime had not yet hardened his heart. He longed passionately to shift back his burdens, but it was too late.

"Where is that check book I left on my desk yesterday, Brent?" Mr. Gordon asked.

Jack started, but did not answer.

"Never mind, take this blank, I will fill it. Present it to the bank to cash."

The clerk looked at him suspiciously. "Mr. Gordon is drawing heavily this morning. I see a slight difference in the signatures. It will be my duty to look into it."

"Very well, sir," Jack responded. His brain was on fire. He was filled with dread. An examination held for him a prison cell and infamy.





CHAPTER XVI.

“LE JEU EST FAIT.”

JACK was walking over a powder mine which might at any moment explode. He could not go home and face them. He even avoided Dartmore.

Dartmore went to his office at the end of the week. “Cheer up, old fellow,” he said. “We must all lose sometimes. Miss Dare is nearly crazy at your absence. You are sick.” He noted his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks.

Jack smiled bitterly. “It is a sickness no physician can cure. Dartmore, if anything should ever happen to me—sometimes things do, you know—I want you to look after them.” His voice dropped to a husky whisper. “I’ve a fancy you care for Dare. I’m glad of it; she is worthy of any man’s love. Nothing would make any difference to you, I know.”

Dartmore answered cheerfully: “Sick fancies,

Jack. Go home; they will bring you around all right."

The office boy entered. "Mr. Gordon wishes to see you in his private office, Mr. Brent."

Jack grasped Dartmore's hand. "Good by, old friend, good by. Tell Dare you have done what you could."

"You look as if you were summoned to the guillotine."

"I have the prisoner's hope, it will soon be all over."

Jack knocked at Mr. Gordon's door. Every joint in his body trembled. A sickening feeling of despair filled his heart. In a moment of frenzy he sought relief from a heavy burden, never dreaming of the bitter cost until too late. He instinctively knew now that it was all up with him. His first impulse was to flee, but he put it quickly from him; for, despite his follies and crime, Jack Brent was no coward. As he entered the room he knew by the stern, hard look of his employer that he need expect no mercy. Like Shylock, he would have his bond."

An officer of the law stood near him. In his face he saw the only gleam of pity.

Mr. Gordon regarded him steadily, and spoke in slow, measured tones—tones oily and choice, that

torture the victim cruelly, as ever rack of the Inquisition did its hapless prisoner.

“Young man, we have found you guilty of a crime. We have the facts; no need of a denial. The check was a clever piece of forgery, even to my eye.” Jack winced to hear the plain name of his deed declared.

Mr. Gordon was a deacon in the church, fond of exhorting. How his soul delighted in admonishing a sinner!

“I do not believe in condoning first offenses”; he smiled grimly. “It serves as an incentive to crime, sir.” He brought down his fist heavily on the oaken desk, by way of emphasis. “My partner, Mr. Van, entirely agrees with me.” He waved his hand in the direction of a mild-looking, shriveled-up old man, who merely nodded an assent.

Mr. Gordon was the active member of the firm. Van & Co. were simply mythical personages to the world. They were silent members of the great firm.

“If I should pardon you, Brent—I don’t handle words with kid gloves—the place would swarm with criminals, like rats in a moldy cellar. It is for the good of the community I give you into the officer’s hands. Secure your prisoner,” he nodded to the policeman.

Jack’s lip curled with scorn, as he replied, noticing Mr. Gordon turn the key in the lock:

“I shall not run away. I have nothing to say in extenuation of my *crime*. That word suits you, I believe, Mr. Gordon. I expected no mercy; I do not ask it. I will lower myself to beg for a week’s time for my mother’s sake. I may be able to straighten affairs by that time.”

“Why did you not think of your mother when you stole my money, sir?” He struck the desk with such force as to cause little Mr. Van to start from his chair in alarm. “No!” he thundered. “If I could mete out your punishment, Jack Brent, I would see you hanged instead of imprisoned for a few paltry years. It was *ten thousand dollars*, sir! You are a thief, sir!”

“Have a care what you say”; Jack excitedly raised his hand, but he thought of what he was, and the passion faded away, leaving his face of an ashen pallor. He said, “I am ready to go with you, Dikes.”

Mr. Van looked after the retreating figures, and said meekly:

“Were you not a little hard on the boy?”

“I am surprised, Mr. Van.” Mr. Gordon looked at him over his spectacles. “It was *ten thousand dollars*, sir. I have conferred a great benefit upon our city to rid her of one of these criminals.”

“I am sorry, Brent,” the officer said, as they walked along. “I must do my duty. I didn’t

know it was you when that man sent for me to ketch a thief," he said. "It isn't true, is it?"

"Yes, Dikes," Jack answered briefly.

"I would never have thought it, and I knowing you since you was a youngster. I wish it had been some other man they sent for."

"Can't you let me go home and get some things?"

"It's agin the regulations. I can go with you, if you'll promise not to cut."

They hailed a hack, and rode rapidly up the hill. Dikes kindly stayed in the kitchen.

Mrs. Brent and Dare were sitting in the library reading, and were startled at Jack's sudden appearance.

Dare threw down her book.

"I am so glad you have come! Have you been sick, Jack? How dreadfully you look!"

Mrs. Brent took his hand kindly.

"You should have come home in your trouble. It was nothing dishonorable, so you need not grieve over a race. I can give you a small sum which will probably cover a few foolish debts."

"I never knew I cared half so much for you before." Dare embraced him impetuously. "I have imitated silly Mariana of the moated grange, and moaned, and moaned, and moaned. Lie down, old fellow, on the lounge. I will make you a cup of tea, myself."

He did not answer.

“What is the matter?” Dare asked, alarmed.
“Do you want to go to your room?”

He simply nodded; he could not trust his voice to speak. He had passed through such heavy seas of trouble, freighted with such frightful visions; now, it seemed to him, here was a peaceful, restful harbor at last, but, like the mirage, beyond his grasp.

Dare left the room, and he sat down on a stool at his mother's knee, as he was accustomed to do when a little lad.

“Mater”—he stroked her hand tenderly—“could you forgive one of us if we sinned deeply?”

Mrs. Brent frowned.

“You are going to plead Eleanor's case. It is useless. I could pardon sin, but never disgrace. I would rather see a child of mine in the grave than a disgrace to the Brent name.”

Jack winced, and said sadly: “Yes mother. It would be better for them and you. I trust heaven is not as hard on man's weakness as the world.”

“Why, Sir Knight,” Dare laughed, coming up behind him and pressing her hand over his eyes. “Making love to Mater? I have been to the kitchen and ordered Aunt Judy to celebrate the return of the prodigal with chicken and oysters, an improvement on the fatted-calf *menu*. I saw a

hungry-looking policeman hanging about, and I invited him to share the repast in the kitchen."

Jack bent his head, and kissed his mother's hand passionately.

"Good by, my darling sister."

"One would think you were going on a journey," Dare exclaimed.

"Yes," Jack thought; "on a journey. Whither?"

"I hope you will rest well. I will not call you until dinner time," Dare said affectionately.

"Call me?" Jack thought, in his anguish. "O, God, where will I be then? Only He in his infinite mercy and wisdom knows. I *shall* rest well and long." His mind shuddered at contemplation of the future: the uncertainty was so awful, man so weak to delve into its mysteries. "But she says death is better than disgrace," he muttered to himself.

He started up the stairs, then stood still as if determined to return. He looked at his watch. He had been awarded half an hour's time, and the minute hand was speeding fast. Half only of his allotted time remained. He stole softly back to the library door. It was half closed, still he could see his mother's proud face turned to the light, while Dare sat near, humming a light air.

"Mother, if you could forgive, I could face the

world," he murmured; "but you said 'better the grave.'"

He gazed at them long and lovingly, as if he would grave their images deep in his heart. He seemed chained to the spot. Five minutes more passed. With an effort he turned away, and quickly ran up-stairs to his room.

"Poor fellow! he looks as if he hadn't slept for a week," Dare said. "You will have to give him another vacation, Mater. Monterey air agrees with him, immensely," she added, in mischievous tones.

While they were talking lightly, planning his future, below, he sat overhead pale as marble, by a table, writing, counting the silent moments as they fled—the tide of his life which was ebbing fast. He murmured a prayer. He was young to die. He took up a pistol, examined it. The minutes were flying fast. He had sinned; his life should expiate it. He would not be a living disgrace: a dead one was soon forgotten. The half-hour had run its course. The time was up. In his fevered imagination he fancied he heard the officer's step on the stairs.

"My God!" he prayed, and placed the steel over his heart.

A loud, ringing sound echoed through the house. The bullet sped unerringly, and Jack Brent fell

back dead. The sound reached those in the library.

“That was in Jack’s room,” Dare cried wildly, and rushed up the stairs. The door was closed. “Jack!” she called breathlessly. Then opened it.

A terrible sight met her eyes. He was sitting in a chair with his head bent forward, his eyes were closed, and a peaceful expression rested on his face. Blood stained his clothing. Great crimson drops steadily trickled down the chair to the floor, and a pistol lay at his feet, in a pool of warm blood. She could not speak. Her eyes dilated with horror. “Jack!” she gasped, in a low, tense tone. She took one of his hands in hers, but it fell from her. It was still warm, the chill of death had not stiffened it yet. She sat there gazing with wide-open eyes. She could neither speak nor move. Mrs. Brent reached the threshold.

“O, God!” she cried, covering her face with her hands. “My boy! What is it, Dare? He—is—not—dead.” Sobs shook her frame, as a mighty storm causes a proud pine to quiver. “Dare!” she implored. “Speak to me!” She went up to her, touching her on the shoulder. Dare showed no sign of consciousness. Her eyes were riveted on that dead face; her features set as marble. “Are you, too, dead? Speak to me, Dare!” No an-

swer came from the silent figure crouching by the dead.

Aunt Judy and the officer, attracted by the report, rushed to the spot.

“De Lord hab marcy!” Aunt Judy groaned. The officer took off his hat and was about to retire.

“Man!” Mrs. Brent cried in her agony. “Go for some one quickly. Send for the doctor. My boy is not dead.” She called his name tenderly, over and over again; but Dare sat there as motionless as the dead.

“Hugh Dartmore!” Mrs. Brent called, as she turned and saw him enter the door. “O, my friend, help us!” She tottered and fell back in his arms, in a dead faint.

He recoiled in horror as his eyes met the scene. “I did not dream of this.” He gave the unconscious form of Mrs. Brent into Aunt Judy’s care, and bade her “take her away.”

Dartmore had been to the office. The news of Jack’s arrest reached him, and he hastened to his home to find him if possible.

“Miss Dare,” he said gently, “this is no place for you. You must go to your room.”

She did not heed. Her expression never changed from the dull, blank look of despair.

“Dare.” He tried to raise her from the floor.
“You must go.”

“You shall not force me, Hugh Dartmore,” she answered, in hollow tones.

Dartmore was powerless to move her. She would not listen to his urging. A physician entered at that time, and ordered them to take her away. She submitted without a word. He felt the pulse. “Dead,” he said laconically.

Dartmore turned away with tears gathering in his eyes.

“Accidental?” the doctor asked, meaningly.

Dartmore shook his head. “I am afraid not,” and pointed to the pistol on the floor. Then he noticed a note folded on the table.

The doctor replied: “This is a very sad affair. A fine young fellow, evidently. Some one must stay with the family.”

“I intend to, sir, and I have sent for Mr. Barton.” The doctor left, and Dartmore sat alone with his dead friend. He could not realize the blow. A week ago Jack Brent was full of life and hope; now he lay there, the sunshine quenched, with a terrible shroud of guilt infolding his memory.

“How can I tell Dare,” he thought.

Mr. Barton entered, horror-stricken. “Deb is desperate,” he said. “She is with Dare, but Dare

seems turned to stone, and Mrs. Brent is still mercifully unconscious. How did it happen?"

Dartmore told him all.

"It is terrible." He shuddered. "It will kill Mrs. Brent. I cannot tell them."

"I loved poor Jack, Barton, and will endeavor to do my duty. I shall sit up to-night. Go home and comfort your wife. I would like to have Arthur, but I suppose Mrs. Brent would object."

"No one but the Healer of all hearts can help them now in their trouble," Mr. Barton said, reverently.

Night came on, and shrouded the house of mourning in darkness. After dark, as Dartmore sat alone in the room with the light turned low, he suddenly became aware of a presence. Dare came up to him softly, laying her hand on his shoulder.

"Mr. Dartmore," she spoke in a tired, monotonous voice, "I heard some one say you found a note. They talked of something awful when they thought I slept." She looked at him steadily with burning eyes. "I must know the truth; the very worst. I shall stay here until I hear it." She passed by him, and sat down by the bed where the cold figure lay.

Dartmore would have given worlds if he could have taken her in his arms and comforted her as

he would a child. He shrunk from telling her. It was like running a knife through his own heart to wound her so cruelly.

She leaned her head wearily on her hand, waiting for him to speak.

"I cannot," he said brokenly. "Wait until morning."

"I will not, I cannot," she answered.

He handed her the note addressed to her. It was brief:

"MY DARLING SISTER—I write to you from the threshold of another world. Think of me, and forgive me. You will hear of my sin before you read this. It is all true they will tell you. It was madness. Dartmore knows. Dolores is lost to me. I do not care for life without her. Love her and care for her for my sake. Be a sister to her, Dare. Mother said, 'The grave was better than disgrace'; so, Dare, I have chosen the better. I know mother cannot forgive. I pray you, Dare, forgive—forgive—"

The paper fell from Dare's hand.

She asked in strained voice, "What do you know?"

"God help me, Dare, I cannot tell. He is right. It was madness."

"You must," she answered calmly, bending over the bed. She turned down the sheet and kissed the cold lips.

"I do forgive, darling," she whispered.

“Go on, Hugh Dartmore,” she commanded, regarding him with stern, tearless eyes. “If it was through you, I can only pray you may suffer as he has.”

He told her the pitiful story, without sparing one detail. She hated him for telling it, while she commanded him to proceed.

“Hugh Dartmore”—she rose, looking like a Greek prophetess in the faint light, with her arm upraised—“I remember the words of warning you spoke to me one night. They have haunted me ever since, and this is the end.” She shuddered. “Take care the sin be not on both our heads, and our hands be stained with blood.”

She disappeared, silently and swiftly as a shadow, from the room.

“If she would only cry like other women, I could bear it,” Dartmore thought, in his misery. “This cold, icy grief is terrible. The other hurts; this kills. What can she mean? Her ravings must be the result of delirium.”

All night long Dartmore kept his vigil by the dead. Dare Brent sat motionless in her room, in the pale moonlight, never speaking; her hands folded, her tearless eyes staring into vacancy.

Aunt Judy sobbed in the corner: “De Lord gabe, de Lord has taken away. Bressed be de name of de Lord.”



CHAPTER XVII.

“WHICH SHALL IT BE?”



THE next day passed in monotonous grief. Dartmore remained in the house, but Dare did not come near him again.

The third day, all that was mortal of Jack Brent was lain away in its last resting-place; and all that was bright and good of him, all that was weak and foolish, was hidden alike under the sod.

Dare sat through the long funeral ceremony in quiet stoniness. She could not weep. Her grief was too deep for lamentation.

After quiet was restored in the house, Dare went to her mother's room, with determination imprinted on her face.

Mrs. Brent was lying on the bed, writhing in her anguish, her pride forgotten.

“Mother,” Dare said, gently taking her hand.

"I must tell you something, although it almost kills me."

"I cannot bear any more. My burden is too heavy," she said wearily.

"You must listen, mother." And Dare told her the terrible story of disgrace.

Mrs. Brent started up, looked at her wildly, and grasped her wrist, pressing it so hard that her fingers left long crimson marks on the flesh.

"It is not true, Dare," she cried wildly. "It is your fancy, child. Anything but this! Anything but this!" She groaned in agony, pressing her hands to her throbbing temples.

"Tell me it *is not* true!" she entreated, in heart-broken tones. "We can bear everything but disgrace. But not that—not that."

"Jack died to save you, mother," Dare replied, in the same wearied, cold manner.

"No blood can erase the stain of crime. Why do you sit there staring at me so calmly, and my boy is dead, my name dishonored?" she cried, her frame shaking with deep sobs.

"Mother, my heart is breaking. Can you not see it? I would have gladly died for him." Dare fell at her feet, sobbing. At last the ice was thawed. Her grief was like the breaking of an ice field, it was so terrible in its intensity.

Mrs. Brent roused herself at the sight. "Forgive me, Dare. We are outcasts together now, and disgraced; but a Brent will not allow the world to think so. I shall live down my grief. Jack was a true Brent. My boy!" she moaned. "We must face the world proudly, Dare. I shall give up the last cent of our money to reimburse the losses of this man Gordon—this *church deacon*," she said bitterly, "who drove my boy to death. O, my boy! my boy!" she added passionately, "would to God I had died for thee, my son!"

Dare's grief had exhausted her, and she fell back in a dead faint.

All through the long night she raved deliriously of Jack.

The days passed on, and she still kept to her bed, scarcely speaking.

The doctor pronounced it "nervous prostration," and said "she would be very ill, unless she was forced to make some exertion."

At the end of a week she said to her mother:

"I would be better if I could see Lel." Mrs. Brent turned abruptly away without answering.

Dare lay there alone in the gathering dusk, her brain busy with shadows and morbid fancies. She had conceived the idea that Jack's death rested upon Dartmore's and her shoulders; that they were

together guilty of a terrible sin. The thought almost maddened her, and she loathed Dartmore as an unholy thing; but felt that there was a mysterious link of guilt between them for all eternity. The gas in the room was turned low, for they thought she was asleep. Weird shadows chased each other across the wall. The curtains looked like tall, mocking specters. Dare could not bear it. She sprung out of bed, excitement giving her strength, and turned up the light, dressed herself, and went to a mirror.

A week had wrought a wonderful change in her face. All the color had gone from her cheeks; they looked drawn and pale. Lines had gathered around her mouth, and large, dark circles rested beneath her eyes. A ghost of a smile flitted over her lips, she looked so pitiful. The door opened, but she did not heed it, supposing it was Aunt Judy, with some villainous decoction of beef tea or gruel.

“Dare,” a sweet voice called—“Dare.”

She turned and saw little Lel standing at the door with outstretched arms, while Rob stood just outside.

“You are so changed,” Lel said, regarding her earnestly, while tears filled her tender eyes.

“Rob!” Dare said, holding out her hand. “I

have been so selfish in my sorrow I had almost forgotten you. My heart feels lighter having you near, with the little one."

"Your mother sent for us, although we intended to come. Dare, we have suffered too," he answered gently.

"I have been so selfish and weak," Dare sighed. Lel nestled close beside her on the lounge.

"Yes, dear," she said, stroking the yellow curls. "I have only thought of myself. I am stronger now. Life must be lived, and it is long and weary."

"The good Lord will comfort us all in time. Submission is a grand lesson of life to learn. You had better lie down, Dare."

"Where is the baby?" Dare asked, with a show of interest.

"Home with Sophronia," Lel replied. "She is such a darling—baby I mean, Dare—she notices everything."

"Little mother must not forget it is baby's bedtime," Rob interposed.

"I can't let you go," Dare said. "Won't you see Mater, Lel?"

Lel looked frightened for a moment, then answered, clinging to Rob's arm, "It is a time to heal all differences."

The pride was well-nigh crushed out of Margaret

Brent's heart, but she came into the room with the air of a fallen empress—but an empress, unmistakably.

Robert Arthur held out his hand cordially. "I am very happy to see Lel's mother. Such a daughter must have a noble mother."

Mrs. Brent would not be outdone in generosity, and she replied, "I see from my daughter's happy face she has found a good husband."

"And a noble one," Dare interrupted.

Rob laughed cheerily. "I am overburdened with compliments. We should have our friend Rivers here as an antidote to my vanity."

A silence fell upon the group at the sound of that laugh. It had been long since a cheerful sound had echoed in those rooms so used to mourning; it startled them.

Lel started to go. "The baby is waiting for me," she pleaded. "May I bring her to you to-morrow, mother?"

"Surely, child." Mrs. Brent kissed her. "We must cling together now."

After they had gone, Mrs. Brent spoke to Dare. "I am so glad you have gotten up. You look better already."

"Poor Mater," Dare answered tenderly. "I haven't thought enough of you. To-morrow I

shall take up my part of our burden. Where have you been this evening?" Dare's voice faltered. "How do we stand with the world? You used to call me your one trouble. Let me make up, and be a comfort now."

"You are a great comfort to me, Dare. We have never known each other rightly. If it was not—for this trouble"—her eyes filled with tears—"I should not mind poverty, if it brought us closer together. I am glad Deb is settled in life, and that Claire soon will be. Then you and I will be left to fight it out alone. I am strong, and I will do it," she said emphatically. "We will pay up every cent. Last month the bank in which I had deposited part of my money failed. We will be penniless, Dare, but we will redeem the Brent name."

"Yes, I cannot eat a crust until I feel we have done all that we can for him. To-morrow we will commence our new life." Dare kissed her mother good night with more tenderness than she had evinced for years.

The next day dawned damp and foggy. The bay was covered with brownish-gray clouds. The houses and pavements dripped with wet. A regular Scotch mist descended. Dare had made up her mind to make a start; so, donning cloak and

hat, she sallied forth on her disagreeable task. She walked down to Gordon, Van & Co.'s office, meeting Dartmore on the way. She bowed coldly, although she could not help noticing that he looked pale and haggard.

Nevertheless, he came up to her. "Miss Dare, you should not be out in this weather."

She answered impatiently and bitterly. "I am trying to atone."

"For what?" he demanded abruptly. "Forget the words I uttered in a moment of anger."

"I cannot forget," she replied sadly. "The thought almost drives me mad. You have suffered too?"

"Yes; for I loved your brother," he answered. "Let me help you as a friend."

"No," she answered shortly, and walked on.

She was shown into Mr. Gordon's office, and she knew when she saw his cold face that she need expect no charity from him.

"You are Miss Brent?" he asked. "Your family has cost me a cool ten thousand, miss."

Dare regarded him with *hauteur*. "Pardon me, sir. I have not come to discuss family affairs. I wish to know the amount of the note. It will be paid you as soon as possible. Mrs. Brent desires you to bring a real estate man with you, and value our property."

“Whew!” Mr. Gordon whistled, after she left the room. “They made a mistake in the Brent family. That girl has grit. She should have been the boy. We shall have our money back, every cent, Mr. Van.”

Mr. Van replied meekly: “I don’t feel quite comfortable about the lad. He was high-strung, and you were a little hard on him—eh, Gordon?”

“He did the best thing for his family—very properly took himself off.” Mr. Gordon rubbed his hands, and turned to the clerk. “Close Mrs. Parker out, Brown. Assessments are due for three months. I am tired of her. Whining women and stocks don’t agree.”

This was your Christian gentleman, who devoutly said his grace over smoking turkey and ruby claret nightly at his dinner table, and whose touching prayers for the widows and orphans (in public) brought tears into the listener’s eyes. This, O reader, was Christian charity. Charity that speaketh, and is praised of the world. The meek and lowly attribute is a thing of the past, a style of last year’s cut. Smother it with ashes. Let it rest in peace. It hath passed into a tradition, and the Pharisee flourisheth. It is better not to give, than to give and not be known.

Dare felt tired after her interview, but determin-

ed to go by Lel's. She felt a little bitterly towards her when she heard her from the outside laughing and singing merrily. "Jack lies dead under the sod in Lone Mountain," Dare thought: "how can anything be joyful?" She entered and found Lel bathing the baby, assisted by Sophronia.

"Little tootsy-wootsy," Lel gabbled, in baby gibberish. "It's glad to see its Aunty Dare."

Dare smiled sadly. "Lel, I came to see if there were any vacant rooms in this building. I would like to come here. Claire is going to stay with Deb for a while. I hope Mater will like it."

"Mother!" Lel nearly dropped the baby in her astonishment. "No one would come to see her. This is a very poor neighborhood—not at all aristocratic."

"We are very democratic now," Dare said.

"There are two small rooms next to Mr. Rivers. They are not even as nice as these. They are cheaper."

"The cheaper the better," Dare sighed. "Mater has broken very much lately, and when I am away I want her near you."

Lel accompanied Dare home, and Mrs. Brent's face softened when she saw the child. Sophronia declared "she wet the baby's shawl with tears when the others were looking away."

Margaret Brent looked worn and aged in the daylight. An air of helplessness and hopelessness surrounded her, as she leaned back in her chair. A stranger would have called her an old woman. Suffering had added many years to her face.

Deb came in, looking charming in her black robes, for Deb could not keep the stylishness out of her clothes any more than she could the dimple out of her chin. They were again a united family, brought together in love by a dead hand, a dear memory. They seemed content as they clustered around the mother with the babe smiling in her lap; but Dare hungered for a voice that was still. The music was all discord to her without that lost melody. Life was very desolate to her just then, but she bore up bravely, enduring her grief in silence. She told her mother of the rooms.

“Every fiber of my nature shrinks from that kind of an existence.” A weary look stole into her face as she said, “Nothing makes any difference now.”

“Mater, don’t look so,” Dare remonstrated. “You may like it after a while.”

“I may endure it, child, but I never shall be content again.”

“Try to think of your living ones, mother.” Little Lel pressed her hand to her cheek. “We

will make you happy." The babe cooed softly in response.

"Lily Barnett is going to be married next week. I suppose the papers will prepare for an extra edition," Deb said. "We have received invitations."

"We have not," Claire said. "It's a deliberate cut."

"Hitting a fellow when he is down," Dare said.

"You must expect it," Mrs. Brent said. "We are no longer of the world. Deb is included with the Bartons."

"I would resent being considered a satellite to a social Jupiter," Dare said, in something of her old manner. "I would prefer shining with my own light, or be blotted out from the stellar system."

"Dare, there is a letter for you on the mantel. I shall walk home with Lel and look at the rooms," Mrs. Brent said, rising.

"I will go up-stairs and begin packing. We must do it sooner or later. It is like going to a dentist to have a tooth out: the oftener you walk around the block to find courage the farther it flies away. It is better to brace yourself up to the pain, and have it over." Dare went up-stairs. She shuddered as she passed Jack's closed door. Then shut herself in and took up the letter.

"Dear Miss Dare," she read. "Would that I

could make your sorrow mine, and bear it for you. I have been successful in this arid zone. My uncle and I have stumbled upon a paying mine in the Tombstone district. I have worked as you bade me, and have succeeded fairly well. I have not forgotten, as you prophesied. I ask the same question again. If the reply is favorable, 'thou shalt be as free as mountain winds.' I think I could make you happy, for I love you, Dare. I would make a home gladly for you and yours. Bid me hope. Yours, TOM JONES."

Dare read the letter through, and fell to musing. "A home for Mater, no work, no hardships for her." It seemed so good to think there was one person who thought of them and loved her through all their trials. She was tempted as strongly as St. Jerome in the wilderness. She searched her heart diligently, hoping to find some spark of affection lingering there, but the search was useless. She endeavored to argue herself into loving. She sat all day until sundown with knitted brows, turning over the problem in her mind, until she finally determined to accept Mr. Jones's offer. "I love him as well as I can any person," she thought sadly. "And it will be better for Mater's sake." She quite made up her mind to write to Jones, when Mrs. Brent knocked at the door, saying :

“I have brought Mr. Dartmore, Lel, and the baby home with me. You must come down.”

Dare smoothed her hair impatiently, threw down her pen. Dartmore had come into her life as a disturbing influence again.

“Lel,” she said, addressing the little mother when she entered the room, “how is our future abode?”

“Awfully brown and dull. Mater does not like anything about them but the price; nevertheless she decided to take them.”

Lel left the room, and Dare sat listlessly holding her hands in her lap.

“Miss Dare,” Dartmore spoke, coming near to her. “What shall be done with Bayard?”

Dare shuddered involuntarily, and answered, in constrained tones: “I thought she was sold already.”

“Would you like to keep her?”

“It is of no use consulting our likes,” she replied wearily. “It is better to have a general suttee of our possessions at once.”

Dartmore changed the subject abruptly. “I heard they wanted somebody to paint at the decorative art rooms, and suggested your name.”

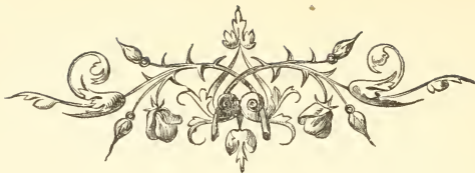
Dare roused up. “Mr. Dartmore, you would not consign me to an eternity of clumsy sunflowers,

bunchy cat-tails, and monotonous peacock feathers, done on billows of olive-green and mediæval-blue backgrounds! I detest it, but"—her voice changed—"like Lazarus, I will be thankful for crumbs. You are very kind to interest yourself."

"Believe me, Miss Dare"—he looked at her earnestly—"your troubles are as near to me as if they were my own." Dartmore's heart felt lighter as he noted the color rising in her cheeks. He said softly, half to himself: "Love is stronger than pride."

When Dare went to her room that night the pen still lay unheeded on the carpet, and Jones's letter was crumpled in her pocket; but her heart shrunk from Dartmore, and she fell to sleep, resolving freshly to hate him.





CHAPTER XVIII.

REVELATIONS.

WELL, Rivers, what do you think of it?" "It is a success," Mr. Rivers responded, slapping him on the shoulder, after the usual manner of masculine congratulation.

The place was Dartmore's studio, the windows of which were opened wide, and through them the light streamed, concentrating itself on a finished picture resting on an easel.

Diogenes's rheumatism had improved so that he has able to creep forth on an occasional critical tour.

"I like it," he added. "It is good coloring. It only needs a little more blending and smoothing down."

"To lose all the snap," Dartmore protested. "I am going to defy the critics, and put it out just as it is."

“And raise a howl in Askelon.”

“And snap my fingers at the Philistines.”

“Come, come, Dartmore, that will do for an old fellow like me. It is put down to the infirmity of age. You young ones must propitiate the so-called art critics, who probably couldn't tell a sign board from a Valasquez, if put to the test. Critics, like cats, must have their fur smoothed the right way, or *voilà!* they bite. Remember the sting of an insignificant animal ofttimes makes itself felt keenly.”

Dartmore laughed.

“Since how long, O worthy Nestor, have you become so worldly wise?”

“As it runs in the copy books, ‘*Experientia docet,*’ and in hard doses, too.”

“Puns at your age, Rivers?”

“A slip, my friend. Punsters are in the first class of the numerous tribe of bores. They are rodents. They have a remarkable capacity for devouring—other people's patience. I recongnize the original of your picture, sir. Out of the abundance of the heart the canvas speaketh. Miss Dare is regaining some of her spirits in her new lodgings, but they tell me Margaret Adair sits listlessly be-moaning their fate. Why don't you drop in to cheer them?”

Dartmore walked to the window and looked out, answering abruptly:

“Because I am not wanted.”

Rivers laughed. “Come around this evening, and tell me of the astute dealer’s opinion of your work.”

As Mr. Rivers entered the door of his lodgings he found Dare sitting on the stairway, looking pale, her head resting against the railing, while suspicious drops of moisture trickled down her cheeks.

“Sentimentalizing?” he asked brusquely.

Dare brushed the drops hastily away, and replied in a tired voice, “Only tired and foolish, Mr. Rivers; I have had a hard day.”

“Have the class or your decorations proved obstreperous?” he asked kindly.

“Neither. Only my faith in humanity has received another blow.”

“Tut! tut! You have been reading novels or overworking yourself with Christmas orders. You are the last person to give up. Come up to my studio with me for a while.”

“Thanks. I do look a little doleful, I suppose; and Mater’s burdens must not be added to.”

Old Mr. Rivers chuckled to himself as he opened his door and pointed to a canvas. I pray you don’t criticise the twist of my Guinevere’s neck. It is not going to be wrung. I am an old man to harbor hankerings after Tennyson, but we will return to childish fancies, and school-day memories linger.

When I was considerably younger than now, your mother and I used to gush over the poet laureate, and possess a sneaking fondness for Lancelot of the Lake. I dubbed your mother 'Cousin Amy,' for a number of years, and was altogether as fierce as that idiot the hero of Locksley Hall. Now, I warrant, we both have forgotten the poems."

"I didn't know you ever knew Mater," Dare said, her eyes brightening with interest. "Why don't you come to see her?"

"Pride, child. I would rather Margaret Adair remembered me as I was, than know me as a bent, rheumatic old cripple. I loved your father," he added. Then fell to musing, as old people oft-times do.

"Dartmore has painted a picture," he said, suddenly breaking the silence. "If it was taken to Europe, it would set them thinking. America is indifferent to her artists and writers. She is too absorbed in trade. This thing of money-getting hardens the character by too much contact with the metal."

"But," Dare spoke bitterly, "money is everything. Money commands fame, happiness, love. They are all commodities purchasable with the dollar."

"Mere morbidity, child. Don't look *inside* the

world. Search for the glitter. You don't quote Carlyle now? Stick to him; his maxims are healthy. Teufelsdröckh knew whereof he spoke. Dartmore has called his picture 'Dare.' It is a face full of courage and daring venture. By the way, I am going to break faith, and tell you Dartmore has bought Bayard. He could ill afford it; but he said he could not see her turned over to strangers. He has been a true friend to you."

Dare looked half glad and half sorry at the news. A lump came into her throat, but she controlled herself and said:

"I am going to tell you something. I shall feel better for it, like weak Hilda in the Marble Faun, after she went to the confessional. This letter," she said, showing him a crumpled sheet, "troubles me. It is from Dolores; she was to have been Jack's wife." Dare spoke the name tenderly, as if it were something holy.

"They were to have been married on Christmas eve." Her voice faltered. "He loved her passionately. Nobody but I knew about it. He worked for and thought of her alone. I was very jealous of Dolores, but I promised him to love her. He bade me care for her, with his last breath. I wrote to her to come to me, and I would care for her as

my own flesh and blood. I could not think of her in my first intense grief. It is almost Christmas-tide. He has lain in his grave for two long months," she sobbed, "and this is my answer. She writes to me she is going to marry a rich Spaniard soon. It is cruel to think such a creature lives on earth, and is a woman. She has written so heartlessly."

"She comes of a fickle race," Rivers replied soothingly.

Dare gained control of herself, and in a changed voice said:

"I have been about as cheerful as Sairey Gamp."

"Halloo!" a voice called outside the door. "Ship ahoy!"

Dare started to go.

"A success, they tell me," Dartmore shouted, not observing Dare at first. "I feel like twenty, instead of thirty-five. Pardon me, Miss Brent," he added, when he saw her. "I thought Rivers was alone."

"No matter," she answered; "it is dinner time, I am going immediately."

"Where is the man can live without dining," Mr. Rivers quoted.

"Or woman either," Dare retorted. "Man was used simply for the sake of rhyming."

After she had gone Dartmore continued:

“There were a lot of artists down at Morris’s; they think it first rate, and warrant I’ll have an offer from Nob Hill. Our vanity is like a slumbering beast. It likes to be smoothed down, and then how it *roars*. I brought a pleasant widow with me—she of Cliquot. Get out your glasses; let’s drink to my picture, and a long life to you, Rivers.”

The old man held up his glass to the light, watching the amber liquid sparkle and effervesce.

“Youth is the sparkle and froth of wine,” he said. “Let the liquid stand a while open in the bottle, and it is flat, stale, and unprofitable. That is age. Dartmore, I do heartily wish you success throughout life. I expect much from you, and you are worthy my expectations.”

The last rays of the sun stole through the garret window, and fell athwart Rivers’s rugged face. Dartmore started. For the first time he saw how old and broken his friend looked, how sunken his eyes, how blue his lips. Like a revelation it came to him, that Paul Rivers’s days were numbered. He grasped his hand impetuously, as if to hold him and keep him always.

The old man read his thoughts in a flash, and they sat together in silence, until the sun went down and the heavens were veiled in darkness.

An expression of peace rested upon Paul Rivers's face. An expression of bitter pain clouded the face of the younger man.

Rivers broke the silence.

"It is what we all must expect sooner or later," he said gently. "I am tired of drifting; the shore will seem very restful at last.

A sweet voice sung trustingly through the gloaming, "Nearer, my God, to thee." The notes fell and rose. An infant's cry sounded, and the mother hushed the little one to sleep, crooning the sweet old hymn. The melody echoed in the hearts of the two friends, as they sat silently listening, and peace abided in them.

Dare found her mother waiting for her, impatient at her long absence.

"What kept you?" she asked fretfully.

"I ran up-stairs with Mr. Rivers for a while. He looks old and feeble now."

"It is always Mr. Rivers. I don't like you to associate with people we would not have entertained in the old days." Mrs. Brent sighed deeply.

Dare worked cheerfully at the evening meal.

"Deb says Aunt Judy is a treasure. The neighbors think she is very tony-looking. I do miss her dreadfully; but she is better off in Deb's house, and an extra mouth counts here."

Mrs. Brent heaved a more sepulchral sigh. "Dare," she said hesitatingly. "Deb and Claire were here to-day. Mr. Varndall wants the wedding to be on Christmas. I don't think it is quite becoming."

"Chester Varndall is right. Claire will not be dependent then."

"And, Dare, Deb says Richard wants me to live with them then. I am not strong, you know," she said, half apologetically. "There will be room for you too."

A cloud of disappointment passed over Dare's face, and she said reproachfully. "Are you not content with me, Mater?"

"O, yes; you have been good, and tried to make it comfortable."

"And failed," Dare interposed. "I dare say the change will be pleasanter for you. It has been dull here. It is better for you to go; but I would rather starve than eat the bread of dependence. O, dear, I smell my dinner burning. I hate to be separated from you, Mater," she said, peering into the saucepans to hide her emotion. "We have been so much to each other; but you will be happier if you go. There is a small room vacant next to Lel I dare say I can inhabit." She laughed a cheerless laugh.

"I am going to tell Lel," Mrs. Brent said, nervously. "I am glad you take it so well. Thanks, I only care for a cup of tea." She declined the offered dinner. "I think it would be better for me to go to-morrow, Dare. I could help with Claire's small trousseau."

Mrs. Brent appeared so eager that Dare endeavored to answer cheerfully. "Certainly not; just as you please." After Mrs. Brent closed the door she sat down heedless of dinner, the very picture of desolation. She leaned her head against the wooden bench on which she arranged her dishes, forming a pathetic picture of a Cinderella, without the remotest prospect of a fairy god-mother. Dare Brent was not a woman to break down easily, for she was brave of heart and uncomplaining. Nevertheless, she was very doleful. The resemblance to the ash maiden struck her all at once, and she laughed outright when she thought of Jones possibly officiating in the role of prince. The name reminded her of an unanswered letter she had been pondering over for weeks, midst painting of plaques and grosses of horseshoes. Sometimes the answer was "No," and sometimes, when she came home and saw her mother's weary look, she firmly resolved to answer "Yes." "It would have been all over by this time," she sighed, "if Mr. Dartmore's

coming had not interrupted me that last night at home." She drew a long breath of relief to think she still was free, then sat down and wrote a courteous note, refusing the offer kindly but firmly. She went to an old writing-desk that had been Jack's, to place poor Jones's letter among the *souvenirs* of the past, and turned over some trifles carelessly, accidentally unearthing a package of letters directed to Jack. The bold handwriting attracted her. The desire to open them was irresistible. She took one up and glanced at the signature—"Hugh Dartmore." She started to refold it, but some power urged her to read. "Now, I shall be assured of his guilt," she thought. "I can hate him thoroughly at last." It is a dangerous point for a woman to reach when she finds it an effort to hate. There is no half-way house in her heart's journey. She is likely to confuse its destination, starting for hatred and landing at love. No rule can be settled in regard to her vagaries. She is *sui generis*. Dare read on, page after page. Then put them aside and sat staring into the fire. "This is the man," she thought bitterly, "I have called guilty. Now it is too late to atone."

They were letters of light banter, mingled with much good advice.

Their contents were a revelation to Dare.

She found one directed to him at Monterey. It ran :

“DEAR BOY—I have found out an amount you owe Sterns and have settled it for you. You should have been honest with me, Jack. A man belittles himself when he cannot look another in the face on account of these so-called debts of honor.

“I urge you now to reform for your family’s sake. I have sown the harvest and reaped in bitterness, so I speak knowingly. My means are limited, or I would help you more. I have seen Sterns. I hope you are even with him. He is your Mephistopheles. Dodge him. Don’t let his influence get the better of you. You will find your best friends and advisers at *home*. Forgive the preaching, Jack, but it comes from my heart. Yours, DARTMORE.”

Dare suffered intensely as she gleaned from his letters what a true friend he had been to Jack.

She was of a positive nature, and dreaded confessing an error; but after thinking the matter over, she determined to go to Mr. Rivers’s room and speak to Dartmore.

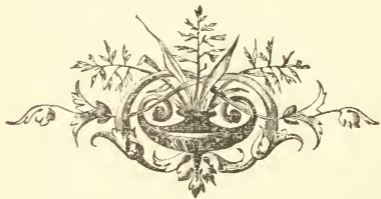
She went out into the hall just as Dartmore with bowed head closed the door of his friend’s room, and started impetuously towards him. He looked up, bowed coldly, and passed on.

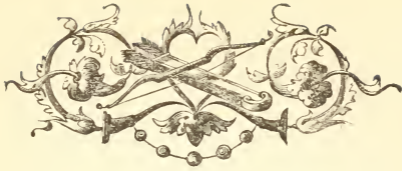
Dare looked after him with regret. Various feel-

ings strove for mastery in her heart. Love, sorrow, joy.

“He despises me at last, and I deserve it,” she thought humbly. “He despises me.”

Like a flash of lightning that illumines the darkening sky the realization came to her. He no longer cared for her, and she—she loved him.





CHAPTER XIX.

“When we dream that we dream,
We are near to waking.”



MR. BRENT was duly installed an inmate of the Barton mansion during the holiday season.

Rob now received an increased salary, and Lel was rapidly developing into a plump little matron, with heart and soul absorbed in Rob and baby.

Mr. Rivers's face grew gentler as he watched her toss the child into the air, and Rob bend over her with a world of love shining in his eyes as he stroked her yellow hair, and whispered proudly, “My wife.”

Richard Barton began to make a name in the scientific world, and pretty Deb was well content in the possession of everything dear to the average feminine heart.

Claire's wedding was celebrated quietly, and she was domiciled in a handsome parsonage, as “our rector's wife.”

“Everything was quite as it should be,” Mrs. Brent declared at last, with proud satisfaction.

Dare was the only one who had not become infected with the holiday gayety, for she possessed a nature that suffered in silence, and could not forget. She heard from Mr. Rivers of the success of Dartmore’s picture, and learned also that it had been sold; but she never saw the artist nowadays, he seemed to have forgotten her entirely.

Jack’s death weighed heavier upon her heart, and often she wished “that she was lying at peace beside him.”

Life stretched so far ahead—such a weary, endless waste for tired feet to tread. She felt that she would fain fall by the wayside, and rest from the toils and woes of the world. Utter annihilation seemed better to her than an interminable existence of monotony.

No feeling in the wide earth is as desolate as the endurance of unceasing sameness. Intense grief, with its first shock, possesses the keenness of excitement, but the calm of endurance is the quality which calls for truest heroism, either in man or woman.

Mr. Rivers was confined to his room, and Dare’s sole pleasure was to be with him, and listen to his praise of Dartmore. She was too proud to ask, but

so eager to hear the slightest item of news about him. She loved him as only proud, reserved natures can; but she seemed to have passed out of his life. He made no sign of her existence.

Christmas came and passed. One day she determined to go down to the gallery and see his picture before it was removed.

The day was wet and sloppy. It was ugly December weather, commencing with an incessant, penetrating drizzle, and breaking out at intervals into a downright pour.

The streets were slush, the pavements slippery and uncertain, bristling with a noble army of umbrellas, defensive and offensive—from umbrellas in extreme youth, shiny and new, with fresh-cut initials staring on the yellow handles, to umbrellas in the last sad decay of age, with broken bones and wrinkles. Umbrellas aristocratic in silken splendor, and plebeian in green cotton, mingled together in ranks, jostling the brown rain-drops off one another upon their owners.

One admires a genuine storm, as one does Milton's Satan. There is something grand, even in its fury; but a weak, sifting, vacillating rain is not to be endured.

The day was short, and a holiday for Dare. Towards evening she donned a waterproof and

veil, and started down town. It was four o'clock. Clerks were wending their way home with brown-paper parcels, suggestive of dinners. A faint aroma of cooking lingered tantalizingly around the portals of the houses she passed. Dare did not look attractive. The raindrops collected on the rim of her hat, then slowly trickled down her face in murky rills, and covered her cloak. When she reached the art gallery she pulled her draggled veil over her face, thereby hoping to escape recognition. The picture was hung at the end of the room in a fine light. It seemed a living embodiment of life and courage, gazing back at her haggard countenance. She felt as if she were the ghost of herself, and this was the reality. The face was relieved against a dark background in high contrast of light and shade, while a bit of crimson drapery was thrown carelessly over the shoulders. Dare stood there, fascinated by its reality. She felt it was not her image, but something higher and better. She did not know how long she stood before the picture, but was roused by a voice at her side, asking:

“Miss Dare, how do you like my effort?”

She turned quickly, and confronted Hugh Dartmore. She was thankful for the kindly protection of the veil. Her lip trembled. “My praise is so insignificant, I fear to add it to the abundance which has already been given.”

"It is a great deal to me. You have a knowledge, and a great *appreciation* of art, which is better. You have chosen a bad day to see the picture; but to-morrow it goes to its destination. I am loth to part with it. I would like to put off to-morrow."

"So would I," she said impulsively.

"Why should you?"

"I don't quite know," she stammered. "I long for the days to pass, yet I dread new ones."

"You are worn out."

"No, no; I like work. I should go mad if my life were like Lily Barnett's or Deb's."

"Or Lel's?" he asked curiously.

"No; hers is a crowned life."

"May I walk home with you?"

Dare could not answer, in her happiness at seeing him again, and they stepped out into the street together.

"Like Mark Tapley, I feel jolly, by contrast, this weather," Dartmore said, as he raised his umbrella.

"I am afraid only the small hoodlum sympathizes with you. Children are the only ones who thoroughly comprehend happiness. They take things as they come, make the best of them, glory in mud puddles and sand pies. Unfortunately, sooner or later we put away childish things, and the puddles are nothing but bits of mire to us."

Dare pushed up her limp veil, which was clinging in brown daubs to her face. The sun was struggling feebly to shine through an opening in the gray clouds. Dare's cheeks were flushed from exercise, and Dartmore started as he noticed her unusual resemblance to his picture.

"You are the image of it," he exclaimed.

"Of what?" she laughed. "I am a sort of Niobe at present, with thousands of teardrops sprinkling my garments. Imagine a Niobe in in brown waterproof. The classic dame would have shuddered at the mere suggestion."

"I like waterproof." Dartmore looked at her expressively.

Dare's heart beat fast. "Mr. Dartmore," she spoke in low tones, "I have discovered how I have misjudged you. I am very sorry for everything I have said or done."

"Let us be friends." He held out his hand impetuously.

They had crossed over into a by-street not much frequented, and, on that particular afternoon, as barren of pedestrians as a country lane at night. Only a few rain-beaten, smoke-grimed geraniums nodded their heads gravely at them, as if in approval of the act.

Dartmore's face lightened up, and despite various

brown rills trickling from his hat brim, looked supremely blissful and handsome.

“Humble pie is a new dish for your palate. I rather enjoy it,” Dartmore said.

“Don’t be impudent, sir. It is an imported dessert, for this occasion only.”

“I am going to take my revenge, and hear all about it. You have made me suffer. I will repay.”

“Desist; remember the scriptural admonition.”

Dare very meekly explained about the finding of the letters.

“Poor Jack!” Dartmore sighed.

The sun shone out brightly at last, transforming the water-drops to glistening jewels. The sun-god pronounced a final benediction, as if in atonement for his all-day absence.

“Dare,” Dartmore said suddenly. “Our lives have been like this day; but see, the sun shines, after all. Long ago I gave my heart and life into your keeping. You cast them away. I thought I would be too proud to offer the rejected articles again, but my love is stronger than my pride. I ask you to take them again. If you refuse, I will never trouble you more.”

Neither of them had noticed the numbers of the streets, and they had walked far beyond their

destination, and wandered into a quiet part of the city.

Dare looked down upon the ground.

“Answer me, Dare,” he said impatiently. “I am not a child to cry out at a hurt. Do you care for me at all? You must tell me. My God! I cannot stand it! I am weak as water, where you are concerned.”

She looked up straight into his eyes and answered simply, “I love you.”

Joy transfigured Dartmore’s face, as the sun illumines some Alpine crag, changing its coldness to all tenderness. He caught her hands in his. “God bless you, Dare; you have made me very happy,” he said hoarsely.

The sun was obscured by clouds again, night was rapidly falling.

“We must go home,” Dare said.

“Where are we?” he laughed, looking around them. “By jove, Dare, we are lost. Cupid steals away people’s brains when he enters their hearts. The idea of two sensible people wandering around like moonstruck idiots. Don’t tell it.”

Dare simply smiled at him in a dazed way.

“I didn’t know you could be so meek, Dare.”

“Wait, sir, until I have you in my power,” she warned him.

He whistled, out of pure happiness. "I don't intend to put off the dreaded day," he said. "I am going to be married to-morrow."

"I won't," Dare blushed.

"You shall; you belong to me. Seriously, Dare," he said, as they reached her home. "Mrs. Malony's rule is oppressive. We are both alone and poor. We might just as well be so together."

"Association is cropping out in the form of hibernicism," Dare replied saucily.

"I have my money for the picture, to begin on."

"And I my work."

"No, madam: I propose to do the outside drudgery."

"I must bear my part."

"Bearing with me will be enough."

They entered the house. "Dinner!" Dare gasped. "I had forgotten it. We must impose on Lel's hospitality."

"And tell them," Dartmore added.

"Not to-night," Dare pleaded.

"Immediately," he replied.

The hall was dark. The solitary gas jet had not been lighted.

"Hugh"—Dare lingered hesitatingly over his name—"I am afraid you don't believe it: I love you, and am very happy."

He put his arm around her, and pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

Suddenly a door opened, a light shone full upon them.

Dare started to run, but Dartmore held her firmly.

Rob and Lel stood aghast. Sophronia dropped the baby—on the lounge, fortunately—exclaiming: “O, Lordy!”

Dare trembled like a culprit caught in the act, but Dartmore drew her into the room.

“Permit me to present the future Mrs. Dartmore,” he said, with a stately bow.

Lel flew at Dare. “O, you darling! I am so glad. Tell me all about it.”

Rob shook hands, heartily congratulating Dartmore.

“Private theatricals—eh, Dare?” Rob asked quizzically, after quiet reigned, and the infant was restored to Sophronia’s arms.

“Only following my relatives’ pernicious examples,” she replied.

“I’m glad you are in time for dinner. Wait a moment.” He grasped his hat, and soon returned with some oysters. “We will repeat your first supper with us, Dare,” he said. “Now we are a staid, old married couple.” He drew the little figure to

him and kissed her. "I am afraid we are as foolish as ever."

"You silly boy!" Lel protested, with tenderness.

"Silly only in loving you too much," he replied.

While this domestic by-play was enacted, Dare sought refuge in the kitchen with the oysters.

Dartmore spoke, after the affection subsided, "My plan is to get a license, be married without any fuss, then tell."

"I will bake a cake, and show you my improvement," Lel said. "I can do it almost as well as Dare."

"Dartmore won't believe it," Rob resorted.

"Dare and I are very faulty people," he answered.

"Rank heresy," a voice called from the kitchen. "These walls have ears."

"Let's choose a practical time: say five o'clock," Dartmore suggested, as they were having a cozy time over their dinner.

Dare left all the arrangements to them: her heart was so full she could say nothing.

Dartmore and Rob walked down town, leaving the sisters alone. Lel drew up a stool, and nestled at Dare's feet. "You will be so happy," she said.

“My life with Rob has been like a pleasant dream. I am a little afraid of Mr. Dartmore. He looks so stern sometimes. May be he will be more like Rob when he is married.”

“Your Rob is a noble man, but I am satisfied,” Dare replied.

“You ought to have lots of things, and you haven’t,” Lel sighed. “You haven’t a suitable dress.”

“I’ve got a relic in the way of a gray silk. I cannot put off my black afterwards, you know—for Jack’s sake.”

When Dare retired that night, life no longer seemed long and wearisome to her, but a smiling mead full of blossom and song. To-day she was Dare Brent, tired and forlorn. To-morrow she would be Dare Dartmore—his wife. Early the next morning Dartmore appeared, accompanied by an expressman bringing a few bits of odd furniture, some books, and piles of canvases.

“Fly around, Dare, roll up your sleeves, we must to work,” he commanded.

“You can camp with us until you are settled,” Lel volunteered. “Your studio must be the parlor; fortunately you can do without a carpet,” she economically reflected.

“Dare, hand up my daubs,” Dartmore called,

from the top of a step-ladder. "I am going to cover the walls with them, they are cheaper than paper."

"Your ladder is shaky," Dare warned. At that instant he toppled over, landing amid a pile of books, dusty and dirty.

Lel laughed heartily. "O, that I should ever see the immaculate Dartmore in such a fix!"

"Wonders never cease, sister mine," he answered, whirling her round in a rapid waltz, in one clear spot.

Dare looked on, too happy to speak, completely dazed by the sudden change in her life.

With the assistance of Sophronia, order was restored by four o'clock.

Dartmore looked around the room with complacency. "Once upon a time, when I was foolish, I would have dubbed these shabby lodgings; now they seem to me a palace."

"Dartmore, time's up. I've got your equipments in my room. Come and array yourself for the sacrifice," Rob called.

Dare dressed herself with Lel's help.

"It looks quite nice, after all," the little matron said. "You have a nice color in your cheeks, and a glad look in your eyes. Here is a spray of orange blossoms Rob sent you." She pinned the

fragrant buds at Dare's throat. "We are going to have carriages, Rob says, although you did insist on the street-cars. Baby is going too. I hope she won't cry. She is lovely in the blue ribbons Deb gave her. What will people say at your wedding, Dare?"

"We are so happy we don't mind, Lel."

"All ready?" Rob shouted at the door. The reply being affirmative, the gentlemen entered.

"Whew!" Rob whistled; "you look stunning, Dare. Where did you and Lel raise the toggery?"

"It's due to woman's wit, sir," Lel answered saucily.

"You must have some of the finery, too," Dare said shyly, as she broke off one of her orange blossoms, and placed it in Dartmore's button-hole.

"The cake is just splendid," Lel whispered to Rob.

They drove to a quiet little church in an unfashionable part of the city. Lel leaned on Rob's shoulder and cried quietly during the ceremony. The baby cooed a gentle approval, and behaved beautifully. The ceremony passed off smoothly, until the aged minister, whose sight was hardly assisted by the glasses he wore, solemnly announced, for Dartmore's edification, "I promise to love, honor, and obey," etc.

“I promise to love, honor—” repeated the luckless bridegroom, bewildered and confused, and then stopped short. Surely the marriage service that he had conned so religiously said nothing about the husband’s *obedience*. Dare smiled, and Lel took the handkerchief from her eyes for a moment, while Rob was engaged in the unsuccessful operation of inserting his into his mouth. Unsuspecting his mistake, the good old man, thinking that he had to deal with more bashfulness than is usually current in California masculinity, went over it again in louder tones, and beamed at the flushed groom reassuringly over his spectacles. There was no help for it, and Dartmore meekly began his wedded life by promising “to love, honor, and *obey* his wife.”

Lel and Rob kissed the bride. Sophronia sobbed audibly, while the minister offered his congratulations; but Dartmore felt a little bloodthirsty towards him. When they reached home Lel ushered them in as “Mr. and Mrs. Dartmore,” while Rob attempted the wedding march on a Jew’s-harp. The whole Brent family were assembled to greet them; only Mrs. Brent sighed as she said, “I knew Dare would do something awful some day.”

With Mr. Dartmore’s assistance, Lel had pre-

pared a tempting supper, and they sat down to it, a very merry party.

“You haven’t treated us fairly,” Richard Barton said.

“I have scarcely known it myself,” she answered.

“I went up to tell our old friend Mr. Rivers, but he was asleep, so I would not wake him,” Rob said.

“We are going to him to-morrow,” Dare answered. “He is too ill to be disturbed now.”

Dartmore went to his work on the morrow, bidding Dare wait for him until evening, when they could go together to see Mr. Rivers, and surprise him with their joy.

Dare sung at her household work. Love had completed her life, softened her character. Verily, love is a great magician and healer. His offices are many, his transformations sudden, his results blessed.

As soon as Dartmore reached home he said :

“Now we will go to my best friend. I feel selfish in my happiness to have neglected him, even for so short a time. He is very dear to me.”

They knocked at his door, but received no answer. Dartmore knocked again.

“It is not locked, let us go in.” Paul Rivers lay peacefully asleep in his bed.

"Hush!" Dare spoke warningly. "Come back. Don't waken him. He looks so white and quiet. Our friend is growing old."

A terrible suspicion flashed through Dartmore's mind. He hurried to the bed, leaned over his sleeping friend, and seized the thin, white hand that rested on the coverlet. It was cold.

"My God, Dare!" he exclaimed, in awed tones, "he is dead."

Dare went quickly to him.

"It cannot be." She felt his hand. Its iciness sent a chill to her heart. She sobbed as she caressed it. "Think, Hugh, while we were so happy and thoughtless he lay here dying alone. It was cruel."

"Hush, darling. He anticipated and I dreaded this. It must have come suddenly, and without warning. It was his heart." Dartmore observed a paper lying on the table.—Seeing his name on the back, he opened it.

"Dare," he said sadly, touching her on the shoulder, for she sat unheeding him, weeping softly by the dead man's side.

"This is his will."

She looked up through the falling tears.

"His will? He was so poor?"

"No, he has bequeathed to 'Alston Brent's

daughter, Adair Brent, jointly with Hugh Dartmore, ten thousand dollars in government bonds.”

She turned to the peaceful face of the dead. “Noble and generous to the last,” she said. “O, Hugh,” as she clung to him, “that he should die alone, and within the sound of our voices!”

Dartmore led her gently down-stairs, while he attended to the last sad rites for his dear old friend, who had drifted peacefully into port at last.

A few months later, when roses bloomed their fairest, blushing in response to the sunbeam’s kisses, their petals glowing in burning colors of gold and crimson; when purple violets peeped from underneath their green leaves, coquetting with the honey-bees; when all the air was full of spring fragrance and new life—Dartmore took his wife across the bay, and enshrined her in a tiny cottage next to the nest Rob had built for his bird.

Dartmore added a large studio to the building, shaded by willow trees and clambering ivy. Pink rose branches swayed over its low roof, mingled with starry jasmine blooms and purple passion-flower.

“This is glorious!” Dare said to her husband, as they stood in their garden.

“My life dream has always been to possess a

tiny Arcadia all to myself, and to have plenty of room to grow in—that is,” she added mischievously, “since I have discovered my genius wasn’t of sufficient brilliancy to illumine the world. I only wish”—her voice changed, as she said in low, sad tones—“our dear friend was here to share it with us.”

“He has found his inheritance in a brighter land, wife. You dusted your ‘Ugolino,’ put it away, saying at last, ‘It was better so.’ Now we must say together, God knoweth best in all things.” ✓



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